

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE MISSION CHAPEL (MCDONNELL HALL)

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (1953-1960)

Other Name/Site Number: McDonnell Hall (1968-2016)
Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (1961-1967)
St. Martin of Tours Church (1914-1952)

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 2020 East San Antonio Street

Not for publication:

City/Town: San Jose

Vicinity:

State: CA

County: Santa Clara

Code: 085

Zip Code: 95116

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Category of Property

Private: X

Building(s): X

Public-Local: ___

District: ___

Public-State: ___

Site: ___

Public-Federal: ___

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

___ buildings

___ sites

___ structures

___ objects

1

___ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Religion Social	Sub:	religious facility meeting hall
Current:	Religion Social	Sub:	church school meeting hall

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: No style

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Wood, Stucco

Roof: Synthetics (composition shingles)

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**SUMMARY**

The former Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel in East San Jose, California, is a one-story, wood-frame structure originally built as a parish church in West San Jose in 1914. The addition of wings to the rectangular building in 1923 created a cruciform floor plan under a cross-gable roof.

When the original owners sold the church building in 1953, it was moved to the current parish's property in East San Jose, reconstructed, and reconsecrated as a mission chapel. The building was refinished with interior lath and plaster and exterior stucco, but the division of interior spaces (vestibule, baptistry, nave, chancel, and sacristy) was retained.

In 1974-1975 the building was moved 450 feet northwest within the current parish's property, rotated 180 degrees, renovated, and converted into a parish hall (McDonnell Hall). With the deconsecration of the building, a small bell tower, stained glass windows, and exterior crucifixes as well as pews and other interior furnishings were removed. At the same time, the addition of interior partition walls and a drop ceiling created new interior spaces (including a large meeting room, a kitchen, and classrooms).

The physical features that defined the building's modest, utilitarian character during its period of significance (1953-1958) were its exterior walls and roof. These features gave the building its footprint and overall dimensions but also created the open volume and interior spaces that housed the functions associated with the building's historical significance. Today, the building has the same walls, footprint, and overall dimensions, and the roof has the same pitch, ridge, and gables, as during the period of significance.¹

LOCATION AND SETTING

The campus of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Parish is located three miles east of downtown San Jose in the center of a larger area known as the Mayfair district (also commonly known as the Mayfair neighborhood). This area remained undeveloped into the early twentieth century. Although the area retained a strong rural character through the 1930s and 1940s, it began to fill with barrios populated primarily by Mexican immigrants and Mexican American families. The area retains its working-class residential character today, with most houses remaining one or two stories in height and smaller than 2,000 square feet. In general, the Mayfair district is level, open, and sparsely planted except in those areas immediately adjacent to residential development.

The parish campus itself covers approximately five acres. It is bounded by East San Antonio Street on the north, Silver Creek on the east, Mayfair Park and residential development on the south, and residential development along South Sunset Avenue on the west. McDonnell Hall sits on a small rise at the southeast corner of the campus, facing north. The building is surrounded by an asphalt parking lot. The parish church and offices are located to the northwest and are surrounded by lawns, landscaping, and mature trees.

¹ This discussion of the building's physical history, appearance, and integrity draws on Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., "McDonnell Hall, San Jose, CA, Historic Structure Report" (draft, 2016), copy in author's possession.

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PHYSICAL APPEARANCE (EXTERIOR)

McDonnell Hall is a one-story, wood-frame structure on a concrete foundation. The building has a cruciform floor plan and measures approximately 40 feet wide by 100 feet deep. The building is raised up two to three feet from the surrounding grade and accessed via several short flights of concrete stairs leading from the surrounding asphalt parking lot to the concrete entry platform.

The building's exterior walls are covered in stucco and painted beige, with narrow-width, vertical wood siding visible within the front-facing pediment. The elevations have white wood trim at their corners, and the fenestration and doorways are trimmed with flat-sawn wood boards, also painted white. Aluminum, sliding-sash windows are evenly spaced and symmetrically placed along the east and west elevations. A pair of aluminum, sliding-sash windows flank the north-facing, double-leaf, solid-panel front doors, which are painted off-white. A wood-post, flat-roof canopy shelters this front entrance (the primary entrance to the building). A pair of fixed windows are centrally located above the canopy and below the gable peak. Additional entrances are located at the middle of the east and west elevations and at the southeast corner of the building, within the east elevation. On the east, the middle entrance leads to a small multi-use area that projects from the rectangular mass of the building slightly south of the midpoint of the building. To the west, a second rectangular projection houses a portion of the current kitchen. A side-entry door is located just north of the kitchen extension, in a converted window opening.

The building has a cross-gable roof clad with brown, modified-bitumen shingles.

North Façade

The north façade is dominated by a large, front-facing gable roof with deep eaves. The north façade is symmetrically arranged around the peak of the front-facing gable. The primary entrance is through double-leaf, solid-panel doors flanked by two aluminum, sliding-sash windows arranged with landscape orientation and level with the top of the door. The entrance is sheltered by a flat-roof canopy topped with brown sheet modified-bitumen roofing. The canopy extends ten feet from the front face of the wall and is supported at the two north corners by four-inch square wood posts, painted white. The fascia on the canopy is the same width as the belt course marking the extent of the first floor framing. Above the belt course and the canopy is a two-light fixed window, centrally located beneath the gable peak and a pair of louvered vent openings. The gable is infilled with narrow-width, vertical wood siding. All openings on the north façade are trimmed with four-inch flat-sawn trim, painted white. The first floor windows are covered with iron grates.

East Façade

The east façade is divided into two sections separated by a small gable-roof projection. To the north of the projection the primary gable roof eaves extend down to shade four aluminum, sliding-sash windows spaced evenly between the front corner of the building and the north wall of the projection. On this side the cross-gable roof meets the eave of the main roof. To the south, the primary gable roof extends further down and the resulting space between the side-gable projection and the south corner of the building is enclosed. The result is that half of the east elevation extends approximately three feet from the face of the rest of the wall and the roof, as viewed from the east, is asymmetrical, extending further on the south end of the building than it extends on the north. An entry door in the north wall of the projection is fixed closed. Another door at the south end of the façade is hidden from view by a thick hedge that covers the southern half of the building below the extended roof eave.

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South Façade

The south façade is relatively unadorned and is dominated by an asymmetrical gable roof. Two aluminum, sliding-sash windows are symmetrically arranged below the gable peak. A third, smaller aluminum window is at the eastern edge of the façade, below the extended eave. This elevation is painted white.

West Façade

The west façade is similar to the east façade. It is divided into two parts separated by a side-gable projection from the primary rectangular mass of the building. Like the east façade, the west façade has different eave depths and heights between the north and south sections. Unlike the east façade, the south section has a higher and shallower eave depth. Fenestration is evenly spaced along the north half of the façade, matching that seen on the east elevation. The southernmost opening has been modified as a door. An additional door is immediately south of the central projecting mass. A small window is the only feature in the west wall of the projecting element. Like all other façades, windows and doors are trimmed with white, flat-sawn trim and all windows are covered with metal grates.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE (INTERIOR)

The interior of McDonnell Hall is divided into a large meeting room with adjacent vestibule and restrooms, a multi-use area, a kitchen, two classrooms, and several smaller storage spaces. Approximately half of the interior is occupied by the meeting room. This space corresponds to the original (1914) nave and is finished with wood wainscoting from this period. To the north of the meeting room is a small, centrally-located vestibule, flanked by two restrooms. At the center of the building is a kitchen that opens into the meeting room via a large pass-through window and door. East of the kitchen is a multi-use area. South of the kitchen are two classrooms finished in contemporary materials. Bordering this classroom area to the east are two narrow storage spaces.

The building does not have a formal second floor. The north and south ends of the building, however, contain loft spaces used for storage. The north space occupies the former choir loft and is accessible via ladder through a hatch in the north wall of the meeting room. The south space was created from the interstitial space between the contemporary classroom ceilings and the original ceiling. This space is accessed via a pull-down stair in the east classroom.

Vestibule and Meeting Room

The primary entrance to the building is at the north end. Double-leaf, solid-panel security doors with crash bars open to a small vestibule with a low ceiling. Restrooms are located on either side of the vestibule. The south end of the vestibule leads into the meeting room.

Moving from the vestibule to the meeting room, the space opens up with a higher, t-bar drop ceiling and seven aluminum, sliding-sash windows. The floor is covered with twelve-inch square, multicolored, vinyl tiles. The baseboards are a combination of wood and rubber, with painted wood floor trim. The east and west walls are finished with lath and plaster and original (1914) dado rails and wood panels, painted brown and yellow. The north and south partition walls are finished with gypsum board, painted yellow. The contemporary windows sitting in the original (1914) window openings are trimmed with four-inch flat-sawn wood boards, painted brown. Built-in shelves are located in the southeast and southwest corners of the room, above the window line. The drop ceiling is suspended from the 1953 arched plaster ceiling and conceals 1953 pendant light fixtures and

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steel tie rods as well as ducting from the building's contemporary air heating system. The ceiling itself is acoustic tile with integrated fluorescent lighting and vents.

The west wall has a non-paneled wood exit door. An interior door and a large, arched, pass-through window on the south wall connect the meeting room and the kitchen. The pass-through window has a counter bar made of tile and cultured marble. A large opening on the south wall connects the main room and the multi-use area.

Multi-use Area

The multi-use area is near the center of the building, and it extends eastward to fill the 1923 east wing. The area has twelve-inch square, multicolored, vinyl tile flooring. The exterior walls are finished with lath and plaster, painted yellow. The interior partition walls are finished with gypsum board, also painted yellow. There is a vinyl, sliding-sash window with painted wood trim on the east wall. An interior door on the south wall leads to the east classroom. Another door on the south wall leads to the storage spaces. An exit door is located on the north wall. This area has a low, gypsum-board ceiling with fluorescent lighting.

Kitchen

The kitchen is located south of the meeting room. It extends westward to fill the 1923 west wing. The kitchen floor is finished with red ceramic tiles and trim. The exterior walls are finished with lath and plaster, painted white. The interior partition walls are finished with gypsum board, also painted white, and some areas of white tile. The walls have wood trim at the doors and windows. The kitchen has an interior door leading north to the meeting room, an interior door leading south to a corridor and the classrooms, and an exit door on the west wall. There is a vinyl, sliding-sash window on the west wall. The kitchen has a low, gypsum-board ceiling with fluorescent light fixtures. The kitchen has semi-professional fixtures and appliances but is no longer in use.

Classrooms and Storage Spaces

South of the kitchen and multi-use area are a short east-west corridor, two classrooms, and two storage spaces. The corridor and classrooms are located up a single step, a 1923 change in floor height that reflected the separation of the chancel from the nave. The classrooms are finished with contemporary materials, including gray low-pile carpeting, interior partition walls finished with gypsum board and painted white, and gypsum board ceilings. The smaller west classroom has one vinyl, sliding-sash window with painted wood trim on the south wall and an interior door on the north wall leading to the corridor. The larger west classroom has one vinyl, sliding-sash window with painted wood trim on the south wall and three interior doors: one on the west wall leading to the corridor, one on the north wall leading to the multi-use area, and one on the east wall leading to the storage spaces.

The two storage spaces are located along the east side of the building. They have twelve-inch square, multicolored, vinyl tile flooring but they also retain traces of the brown and green tile flooring installed in 1953. The exterior walls are finished with lath and plaster, painted white. The interior partition walls are finished with gypsum board, also painted white. They gypsum board ceiling is painted white with no trim.

ALTERATIONS

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall) was originally designed by San Jose architect Louis Lenzen and constructed in West San Jose (on West San Carlos Street at Cleveland Avenue) by Blair and Chase

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builders in 1914. It was built as the church for St. Martin of Tours Catholic Parish.²

Originally a rectangular plan building with a front gable roof, the building was enlarged in 1923. The addition of two modest wings created a cruciform floor plan with a width of 40 feet and a cross-gable roof. At the same time, an increase in length to 100 feet allowed the parish to move the altar further back, add a small sacristy, and install additional pews.³

The building underwent extensive restoration work in 1948, when St. Martin's Parish hired San Jose architect Vincent Raney to oversee work on the building's interior spaces (vestibule, baptistry, nave, chancel, and sacristy) and its exterior. Raney's contract called specifically for refurbishing, staining, and varnishing all wood dado rails and trim, repainting the walls (above the dado rails) and ceiling, refinishing all exposed pine flooring, refurbishing and painting all exterior wood and metal, and replacing the roof.⁴

First Relocation and Reconstruction (1953)

As discussed in the narrative statement of significance (below), the building was dismantled, relocated to East San Jose, reconstructed, and reconsecrated as a mission chapel in 1953.

A year earlier, Archbishop John Mitty had designated East San Jose's Mayfair district a "mission area" within St. Patrick's Parish, and he assigned a young, Spanish-speaking priest, Father Donald McDonnell, to serve as pastor in residence. St. Patrick's Church was located in downtown San Jose, but thousands of Mexican Catholics in the Mayfair district had long desired a church or chapel closer to where they lived. St. Martin's Parish had decided to construct a new church building, so the pastor offered to sell the 1914 building to St. Patrick's Parish for use as a chapel in the new mission area. McDonnell secured authorization and funding, acquired a plot of land in an Eastside barrio known as Sal Si Puedes, and hired architect Vincent Raney and contractor John Pursley to oversee the relocation and reconstruction of the building. He also turned to Cesar Chavez—his parishioner and friend and an emerging leader in East San Jose—to organize a crew of volunteers who would assist with the work.⁵

The work began in June 1953. In a narrative report to Archbishop Mitty, McDonnell noted that "volunteer workers from the neighborhood of 'Sal Si Puedes' removed the roof and stripped the building down to the plate line of the walls." After the side wings were removed, the rest of the building was cut into three sections, loaded onto trucks, and moved across the city to a plot of land that fronted on Kammerer Avenue between Silver Creek and South Sunset Avenue. The building sections were lowered onto a new concrete foundation and secured. McDonnell noted that "new roof rafters were erected and volunteers then put on new sheathing and shingles." The building's bell tower was rebuilt, but at a lower height. Plasterers finished the exterior walls with scratch and finish coats of stucco and the interior walls and arched ceiling with lath and plaster. Plumbers and electricians installed new wiring, plumbing for a new restroom, and a new heating system. Chavez and other

² Untitled report on development of St. Martin of Tours Parish (n.d., ca. 1935), St. Martin's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, Diocese of San Jose Archives and Records, San Jose, California (hereafter DSJAR).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Vincent G. Raney, "Specifications for Painting, Roofing, and Repair for St. Martin's Church" (July 13, 1948), St. Martin's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; "Parish Historical Report, Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 1948," St. Martin's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR.

⁵ Rev. Donald McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center (n.d., ca. 1953), Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Guadalupe Center, San Jose," Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Menlo Park, California (hereafter AASF); Donald McDonnell, interview by author, Oakland, California, November 11, 2011; Richard Chavez, interview by author, Keene, California, December 15, 2010; Rita Chavez Medina, interview by author, Morgan Hill, California, November 22, 2011; Gina Marie Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,': Ethnicity, Church, and Community Activism in the San Francisco Archdiocese's Mexican American Colonias, 1942-1965" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2003), 195.

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volunteers painted the interior walls and woodwork and the exterior trim. Stained glass windows were re-installed, and tilers laid brown and green asphalt tiles. Finally, the altar, altar rail, thirty pews, and other furnishings were moved into place. The reconstruction was completed in October 1953, and the building was reconsecrated as Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel in December 1953. A sociologist who studied East San Jose in the early 1950s described the chapel building as a stucco structure topped by a squat belfry. "The floor plan is cruciform," she noted, with "seating for about 250 people. . . . Anterooms include a baptistry and a sacristy which also serves as the church office."⁶

Father McDonnell's fortuitous acquisition of a former church building gave Mexican Catholics in East San Jose a chapel with a bell tower and stained glass windows as well as a familiar division of interior spaces (vestibule, baptistry, nave, chancel, and sacristy). The chapel building's fundamental character, however, was simple, modest, and utilitarian. The building derived this character from its exterior walls and roof, which gave the building its footprint and overall dimensions but also created the open volume and interior spaces that housed the functions associated with the building's significance.

Second Relocation and Renovation (1974-1975)

The building was moved 450 feet northwest within the current parish's property in 1974. It was rotated 180 degrees, renovated, and converted into the parish hall in 1975.

The impetus for this second relocation and renovation can be traced to the early 1960s. Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission continued to grow through the 1950s and, by the time the mission became an independent parish in 1962, it had acquired eight acres of property along South Jackson Avenue, two blocks east of the chapel building (which became Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in 1962). In 1963, the California Highway Department notified Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish of its intention to acquire this parish property for the construction of Interstate 680. Anticipating the loss of a rectory and other parish buildings located on this property, the parish purchased nine acres of undeveloped property adjacent to the chapel/church building on Kammerer Avenue and extending northwest to East San Antonio Street. The parish planned to construct a new church, rectory, and other buildings on this property in order to maintain, consolidate, and better accommodate parish services. After a modern, reinforced-concrete church was completed in 1968, the parish began to develop plans for converting the old chapel/church building into a parish hall. In 1970, the City of San Jose asked to purchase the original plot of land where the building was located (in order to develop Mayfair Park). The parish agreed, with the understanding that the old chapel/church building would be moved closer to the new church building. After repeated delays, the city finally approved the relocation in October 1973.⁷

The building was moved 450 feet northwest in April 1974. Before the move, the building's stained glass windows and exterior crucifixes were removed. Additional work was postponed until a new concrete foundation was laid in January 1975. Then the building was rotated 180 degrees, moved into place, and secured to the foundation. Exterior and interior renovation work would continue through March 1975. The exterior work, in

⁶ McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; McDonnell, interview; Vincent G. Raney to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, July 10, 1953, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF; Margaret Clark, *Health in the Mexican-American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 99-100.

⁷ Rev. Anthony Soto to Archdiocesan Building Commission, July 17, 1964, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; Rev. Anthony Soto to Most Rev. Joseph T. McGucken, July 21, 1967, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; Manuel Villarreal, proposal submitted to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, February 6, 1968, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; Fr. Anthony Soto to Most Rev. Joseph T. McGucken, May 8, 1970, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; Fr. Anthony Soto to The Chancery, August 24, 1970, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; "No fire hydrant near delays church plans," *San Jose Sun*, October 31, 1973, clipping in parish scrapbook, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, San Jose, California (hereafter OLGP).

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general, included the modification of window openings and the replacement of windows, selective replacement of stucco, removal of the bell tower, and selective extension of the roof eaves. Interior renovations included the conversion of the baptistry into a restroom, the enclosure of the choir loft, and the installation of new floor tiling, interior partition walls, and a drop ceiling.

On the north façade, window openings on either side of the double-leaf doors were modified, and two sliding-sash windows were installed. A small canopy was replaced by a larger canopy measuring twenty feet wide and ten feet deep, painted white. A wood belt course, also painted white, was added above the canopy. Four pointed-arch window openings and a small diamond-shaped window opening above the canopy were modified and partially concealed, and a two-light, fixed window was installed. The gable was infilled with narrow-width, vertical wood siding. A pair of louvered vent openings were retained. Like the other openings on the north façade, they were trimmed with flat-sawn wood boards, painted white. Below the belt course, the exterior stucco was repaired and retained.

On the east façade, a small window opening near the north corner was concealed. A small gap between the southeast enclosure and the gable-roof projection was infilled to create a single wall plane along the south half of the elevation. Six window openings were modified from pointed arches to rectangular frames, and six sliding-sash windows were installed. The exterior stucco was repaired and retained, and the walls were finished with wood trim.

On the south façade, a large, pointed-arch window opening, high on the wall, was concealed. Two window openings flanking the larger opening (and, viewed from the interior, framing the location of the altar) were modified and partially concealed, and two sliding-sash windows were installed. A smaller third window was installed near the interior storage spaces at the southeast corner. The exterior stucco was repaired and retained.

On the west façade, three window openings were modified from pointed arches to rectangular frames, and three sliding-sash windows were installed. (A fourth window opening near the center of the elevation was modified into a door opening prior to 1974. This doorway was retained.) A fifth window opening on the gable-roof projection was modified from a pointed arch to a rectangular frame, and a sliding-sash window was installed. The exterior stucco was repaired and retained, and the walls were finished with wood trim.

The small bell tower at the northwest corner of the building (above the location of the baptistry) was removed. On the northern half of the building, the eaves of the roof were extended approximately three feet.

In the interior, the renovation work was primarily additive—not subtractive—and therefore is reversible. The baptistry in the northwest corner, adjacent to the vestibule, was converted into a restroom. The choir loft at the north end of the building was enclosed for use as storage space. (This area is accessible via ladder through a hatch in the north wall of the meeting room, and it contains the visible framing for the former bell tower.)

Interior partition walls and doorways were installed, creating a new division of interior spaces that echoed the former division of spaces. An east-west wall defined the large meeting room, for example, and this space corresponds to the original (1914) nave. South of this wall, the kitchen and multi-use area correspond to the 1923 wings that created the cruciform floor plan. New partition walls defining the corridor and classrooms correspond to the chancel, and the storage spaces at the southeast corner correspond to the sacristy.

Along the exterior walls, pointed-arch window openings were modified to fit conventional, rectangular windows, but most of the original framing was left intact behind the wall finish materials. Three doorways in the large meeting room (leading to the baptistry, choir loft, and restroom) were enclosed. Much of the wood

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wainscoting was retained.

A t-bar drop ceiling was installed, but the arched plaster ceiling, steel tie rods, pendant light fixtures, and other finish materials above the new ceiling were left intact. In most areas, the floors were refinished with new tiling or low-pile carpeting, and the walls received new coats of white, yellow, or brown paint.

ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRITY

During the period of significance (1953-1958), the fundamental character of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall) was that of a simple, modest, utilitarian building. The physical features that defined this character were the exterior walls and roof, which gave the building its footprint and overall dimensions but also created the open volume and interior spaces that housed the functions associated with the building's historical significance. Today, the building has the same walls, footprint, and overall dimensions, and the roof has the same pitch, ridge, and gables, as during the period of significance.

To be sure, the 1974-1975 relocation and renovation impacted the building's physical features. The bell tower and stained glass windows were removed, altering the building's exterior appearance. Floor tiling and other interior finish materials were replaced. Most alterations, however, were additive and thus reversible, including the extension of eaves and the installation of partition walls and a drop ceiling. These changes concealed certain physical features but—as close inspection confirms—left them intact.

Ultimately, the building retains a high degree of integrity, especially in the categories of feeling and association.

Location and Setting

In 1974-1975 the building was moved 450 feet northwest within the current parish's property and rotated 180 degrees. Still, of all the properties associated with this phase of Cesar Chavez's productive career and with the convergence of Latino labor rights advocacy, civil rights advocacy, and Catholic ministry during the early Cold War era, this building retains the highest degree of integrity and thus qualifies for designation under Exception 2 (as discussed below).

The 1974 relocation was within the same parish property. The parish constructed a new church building in 1968 and acquired or constructed several smaller buildings in the years that followed, but the former chapel building still sits apart on the parish property. Given the modest relocation, the building retains the same larger setting, and that setting has a high degree of integrity. The surrounding neighborhood has seen modest residential growth, but the character of that growth has changed little since the 1950s, and Silver Creek is still a defining feature of the landscape.

Design

During the period of significance, the building had a cruciform floor plan and a familiar division of interior spaces (vestibule, baptistry, nave, chancel, and sacristy), exterior walls and an arched ceiling that created an open volume, windows located at regular intervals, simple pendant light fixtures, and a cross-gable roof.

Today, the building retains its cruciform floor plan, and the current division of interior spaces echoes the original division. The building retains the same exterior walls, arched ceiling, elevated window locations, pendant light fixtures, and cross-gable roof as well as most of the same finish materials as during the period of

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significance. The 1953 floor plan and open volume have been somewhat obscured by partition walls and a drop ceiling, framing for the pointed-arch windows has been covered by wall finish materials, and the pendant light fixtures and arched ceiling have been concealed by the drop ceiling, but these were additive changes that remain reversible.

Materials and Workmanship

The building contains a combination of original and contemporary materials. Original exterior materials include more than 90 percent of the 1953 exterior stucco, window and door framing, and exterior vents. Original interior materials include 100 percent of the arched plaster ceiling, 75 percent of the light fixtures, 50 percent of the plaster wall finish material, and nearly 50 percent of the original (1914) wood wainscoting. New flooring has been applied and window openings have been squared off, but traces of the 1953 flooring remain, and the original (1914) pointed-arch framing is intact. Overall, approximately 75 percent of the 1953 finishes remain intact.

The workmanship of the original (1914-1923) construction period is evidenced by the quality of materials used and the craftsmanship of the original construction team. Cesar Chavez, his brother Richard Chavez, and a dozen or more family members and friends helped relocate and reconstruct the building in 1953, and they took pride in their workmanship as well. This building has been expanded (1923), cut into sections to facilitate its relocation (1953), and moved again, intact (1974), yet it remains structurally sound and still retains most of its original shell and framing.

Another hallmark of the building is its relationship to the parish and especially the parishioners who have volunteered their labor over the decades to relocate and reconstruct the building (1953), to relocate and renovate the building (1974-1975), and to maintain the building as needed. The simplicity of design and the choice of materials for reconstruction, renovation, and repair are consistent with the community and the volunteer labor pool. Today, the building's location, design, materials, and workmanship together reveal the extent to which care for this 102-year-old building has been and continues to be a labor of love.

Feeling and Association

Longtime parishioners and former parishioners have attested to the building's high degree of integrity of feeling. During a recent visit to the building, for example, former Community Service Organization president (and co-founder of the National Council of La Raza) Herman Gallegos "immediately recognized it," recalled "the good things that happened there," and thus felt the same "sense of well being" he felt when working there with Father McDonnell and Cesar Chavez in the 1950s. Outside observers might conclude that the building no longer has the same "feeling" that a church building should have—but during its period of significance (and after), the building was more than just a church. As the narrative statement of significance explains, the building was a symbol and thus a constant reminder of the struggle, perseverance, and victory that brought it to the Mexican Catholic community of East San Jose in 1953. It also was a building that served the community because it functioned as a church and as a multipurpose center. Today, the former chapel building still retains the feeling of a building that serves its community.⁸

Longtime parishioners, former parishioners, and others also have attested to the building's high degree of integrity of association with the ministerial work of Father McDonnell (after whom the building was renamed), with the Community Service Organization and Mexican American civil rights advocacy, with the farm worker movement, and with the life and leadership of Cesar Chavez. In recent years, both Dolores Huerta and Richard

⁸ Herman Gallegos, interview by author, Galt, California, April 6, 2012.

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Chavez identified the chapel building as the place where the farm worker movement began. For El Teatro Campesino founder Luis Valdez (whose family members were parishioners in the 1950s), the building still resonates as a symbol of the farm worker movement but also as a broader symbol of an “ongoing struggle in the heart of humanity” for “social justice.” Successful efforts to designate the building as a historical landmark at the local and state levels reflect the continuing strength of these associations.⁹

⁹ Salvador Alvarez, interview by author, San Jose, California, March 13, 2015; Richard Chavez, interview; Luis Valdez, interview by author, San Juan Bautista, California, July 9, 2012. McDonnell Hall was designated a City of San Jose Historic City Landmark in 2011 and a California Historical Landmark in 2013.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
 Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National
 Register Criteria:

A X B X C D

Criteria Considerations
 (Exceptions):

A X B X C D E F G

NHL Criteria:

1 and 2

NHL Criteria Exceptions:

1 and 2

NHL Theme(s):

I. Peopling Places
 4. community and neighborhood
 II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
 3. religious institutions
 III. Expressing Cultural Values
 6. popular and traditional culture
 IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
 1. parties, protests, and movements
 V. Developing the American Economy
 4. workers and work culture
 VIII. Changing Role of the U.S. in the World Community
 4. immigration and emigration policies

Areas of Significance:

Industry, Social History, Ethnic Heritage (Hispanic), Religion, Politics/Govt

Period(s) of Significance:

1953-1958

Significant Dates:

N/A

Significant Person(s):

Chavez, Cesar

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Lenzen, Louis T. (design, 1914)
 Blair and Chase (construction, 1914)
 Raney, Vincent (redesign, 1953)
 Pursley, John (relocation and reconstruction, 1953)

Historic Contexts:

American Latinos and the Making of the United States (2013)

Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker Movement in the American West (2004, in
Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment, 2013)

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**SUMMARY**

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall) is nationally significant for its close association with Cesar Chavez and for its association, more broadly, with ethnic Mexican migrant labor and labor organizing efforts, the Catholic Church's efforts to minister to ethnic Mexicans, and the Mexican American civil rights movement during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Guadalupe Mission Chapel gained national historical significance under NHL Criterion 1 upon its dedication in 1953. The new chapel was a product of the U.S. agricultural industry's growing reliance on ethnic Mexican migrant labor, the American Catholic Church's heightened efforts to minister to braceros and other ethnic Mexican workers, and the growth of the Mexican American civil rights movement. Upon its dedication, the chapel building became a symbol of struggle, perseverance, and faith for ethnic Mexicans who had faced decades of mistreatment in the U.S.

From 1953 to 1958 the chapel building gained significance under NHL Criterion 2 because of its association with Cesar Chavez. Throughout these years (and beyond), the building functioned as a parish church and as a multipurpose center. It housed religious services but also provided a home for the Community Service Organization (CSO), the most important Mexican American civil rights organization of the early Cold War era. These hybrid functions created a dynamic space that spurred Chavez's emergence as a community organizer, civil rights leader, and labor rights leader.

After 1953 the chapel building gained additional significance under NHL Criterion 1 because it connected the Mexican American civil rights movement, Catholic ministry to ethnic Mexicans, and ongoing efforts to organize ethnic Mexican farmworkers. This intertwining strengthened Mexican American civil rights and labor rights advocacy during the 1950s, led to the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964, led to the passage of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975, helped drive the early Latinization of the American Catholic Church, and ultimately helped shape modern American Latino identity.

Guadalupe Mission Chapel qualifies for designation under NHL Criteria Exception 1 because it derives its significance from its historical functions and associations. The chapel building provided space for functions that were religious in nature and functions that were not religious in nature (such as the activities of the CSO). The space was dynamic, and thus it encouraged Cesar Chavez to weave together lessons about Catholic social doctrine he learned from Father Donald McDonnell with lessons about community organizing he learned from CSO organizer Fred Ross. More broadly, the building provided space for an intertwining of Mexican American civil rights advocacy, Catholic ministry, and ongoing efforts to organize ethnic Mexican farmworkers.

The chapel building also qualifies for designation under NHL Criteria Exception 2. In 1974-1975 the building was moved 450 feet northwest within the current parish's property and rotated 180 degrees. Despite this modest change in location, the building qualifies for designation because it is the property most closely and most importantly associated with the first phase of Chavez's career as a community organizer, civil rights leader, and labor rights leader. The *Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* (2013) identified 1952 to 1962 as a distinct phase in Chavez's productive career. Of the nineteen properties associated with this phase, the chapel building retains the highest degree of integrity.

The following narrative statement of significance justifies these NHL criteria and criteria exceptions. The

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narrative also illustrates five areas of significance: industry, social history, ethnic heritage (Hispanic), religion, and politics/government. Although the narrative pivots around the period of national significance (1953 to 1958), it establishes a longer arc of historical change that began in the 1920s and lasted through the mid 1970s.

INTRODUCTION TO THE NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This narrative surveys the historical contexts that illuminate the national historical significance of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). As the narrative explains, the significance of the chapel building springs, in part, from its association with Cesar Chavez (1927-1993), the most important Latino leader in the United States during the twentieth century.¹⁰

In 1953, Father Donald McDonnell—a Catholic priest who had become one of Chavez’s mentors—was working to build a mission chapel that would serve ethnic Mexican families in East San Jose. McDonnell had acquired a plot of land in Sal Si Puedes, the Eastside barrio where Chavez lived with his wife and four young children. When McDonnell secured a surplus church building from a parish in West San Jose, Chavez helped relocate the building and reconstruct it as a mission chapel. By December 1953, when the chapel building was consecrated, Chavez had begun to work with his other mentor, Fred Ross, to organize new chapters of a civil rights organization known as the Community Service Organization (CSO). This work would take Chavez from San Jose for stretches of time, but for the better part of five years—until Chavez moved to Oxnard in September 1958—Guadalupe Mission Chapel was an important part of his life. Chavez attended Mass and participated in other sacramental services in the chapel building, but he also assisted McDonnell as the priest ministered to thousands of braceros and other ethnic Mexican farmworkers in the chapel and throughout the Santa Clara Valley. At the same time, Chavez participated in the meetings, voter registration drives, and other activities of the San Jose chapter of the CSO, which found a home in the chapel building. Chavez also observed the impact of a credit union and health clinic, both of which found homes in the building and informed Chavez’s later efforts to provide these services to members of the United Farm Workers union. During Chavez’s time with McDonnell, the priest taught him that the Catholic faith was an activist faith that called upon its adherents to fight for social justice. During his time with Ross and his fellow CSO members, Chavez learned that the marginalized could gain power through organization and then use this power to secure social justice. Guadalupe Mission Chapel was the place where Chavez wove these lessons together and first put them into action.

¹⁰ It has become common practice among scholars to use accents in Chavez’s name. Neither Chavez nor his family members used accents in their names, and I have chosen to spell their names as they spelled them. Where titles of published works have used accents, I have retained those accents. Older works that helped establish Chavez’s significance include Peter Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes: César Chávez and the New American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1973); Jacques E. Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (1975; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *César Chávez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995). More recent works that confirm and contextualize Chavez’s significance include Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011); Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Frank P. Barajas, *Curious Unions: Mexican American Workers and Resistance in Oxnard, California, 1898-1961* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Miriam Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014); Luis D. León, *The Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez: Crossing Religious Borders* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Lori Flores, *Grounds For Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016); and Gabriel Thompson, *America’s Social Arsonist: Fred Ross and Grassroots Organizing in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

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This narrative also explains that the national historical significance of Guadalupe Mission Chapel springs from the building's association with broader patterns of events that made a significant contribution to the development of the United States—and to its Latino population in particular—during the twentieth century.

Three patterns of events (or historical trajectories) were particularly important. One trajectory began with the growth of the agricultural industry in the American West during the early twentieth century. This trajectory encompassed the agricultural industry's increasing reliance on ethnic Mexican migrant labor (including several million Mexican immigrants who worked under the Bracero Program, 1942-1964), continued with efforts to organize farmworkers, and culminated with the enduring achievements of the United Farm Workers union. A second trajectory began with the growth of the American Catholic Church during the early twentieth century. This trajectory continued with the Church's recognition of—and responses to—the challenges of ministering to ethnic Mexican Catholics, and it culminated with the growing Latinization of the American Catholic Church. A third trajectory began with the emergence of ethnic Mexican civil rights advocacy during the early twentieth century. This trajectory encompassed the coalescence of a Mexican American civil rights movement after World War II, continued with a heightened emphasis on civic engagement and electoral politics during the early Cold War era, and culminated with an expanding focus on the human rights and human dignity of all Latinos, regardless of their national origin or citizenship status.

These three trajectories converged and intertwined during the 1950s. They began to converge in the early 1950s, when McDonnell, Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and other Catholics started working with Fred Ross, Saul Alinsky, and other civil rights advocates to advance the agenda of the Community Service Organization. The trajectories then began to intertwine as McDonnell and other Catholics continued to support the civil rights agenda of the CSO but also worked to advance a labor rights agenda—by supporting Ernesto Galarza's efforts to dismantle the Bracero Program but also by supporting Chavez's earliest efforts to organize CSO chapters among farmworkers in California's Central Valley. By the late 1950s, the CSO itself was endorsing Galarza's efforts but also beginning to explore how a labor rights agenda might fit within its own broader civil rights agenda.¹¹

Guadalupe Mission Chapel provided a crucial space for this intertwining of ethnic Mexican labor and labor organizing, Catholicism, and civil rights advocacy—and the building helped sustain this connection through the 1960s and into the 1970s. The intertwining itself was important, in part, because it shaped Chavez and spurred his emergence not only as a community organizer but as a civil rights leader and labor rights leader. The intertwining also influenced each of the three trajectories. It strengthened Mexican American civil rights and labor rights advocacy during the 1950s, led to the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964, led to the passage of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975, helped drive the early Latinization of the American Catholic Church, and ultimately helped shape modern American Latino identity. These three trajectories were regional, national, and even international in scope, yet they were rooted in communities like East San Jose, and they were tied to unassuming buildings like Guadalupe Mission Chapel.

The National Park Service has commissioned several theme studies that help illuminate the national historical significance of Guadalupe Mission Chapel. *Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker Movement in the American West* (2004) establishes Chavez's national historical significance but also surveys Chavez's work with McDonnell and Ross, the growth of the CSO, and Chavez's emerging civil rights and labor rights leadership between 1952 and 1962. More recently, *American Latinos and the Making of the United States* (2013) includes four essays that provide context related to Latinos and civil rights advocacy, labor and labor organizing, and religion. Stephen Pitti's introductory essay offers an overview of Latino labor rights and civil rights advocacy and

¹¹ Chavez would leave the CSO in 1962 because of the CSO's decision to de-emphasize that labor rights agenda, but during the mid 1950s an estimated 70 percent of CSO members were farmworkers, and their investment in labor rights advocacy was growing. See Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 155.

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emphasizes the career of Congressman Edward Roybal, who worked with Ross, Chavez, Huerta, and others to turn the CSO into “the most important Latino civil rights organization on the West Coast during the 1950s.” Louis DeSipio’s essay offers context for understanding how the CSO built on the foundations provided by older civil rights organizations but also “transitioned Latino politics from civic organizing to electoral mobilization” during the early Cold War era. Zaragoza Vargas’s essay discusses agricultural labor, the Bracero Program, efforts to organize farmworkers, and Chavez’s own use of “marches, community organizing, secondary boycotts, consumer boycotts, and [other forms of] nonviolent resistance.” Timothy Matovina’s essay offers context for understanding how the Catholic faith provided Chavez and other Mexican Americans a “means of public communal expression, affirmation, . . . and resistance.”¹²

Three other theme studies have looked at civil rights advocacy, but their emphasis on African American efforts limits their usefulness for this nomination. In *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States* (2000), for example, Vicki Ruiz discusses *Méndez et al. v. Westminster School District et al.* (1947) in the context of the NAACP’s legal campaign against school segregation, but she slights the work of Fred Ross and the context of Mexican American organizing that directly connected *Méndez et al.* to the creation of the CSO in Los Angeles in 1947. In *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations* (2009), Matt Garcia surveys Mexican American civil rights advocacy in Southern California in the 1950s (with some discussion of Fred Ross and the CSO), but he ignores Northern California. In *Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights* (2009), Neil Foley examines Mexican American voting rights, but he restricts his focus to Texas. A fourth theme study, *American Labor History* (2003), offers little on agricultural labor, but it does emphasize the role that religious buildings have played in the broader history of labor and labor organizing. “Churches and synagogues once seemed unrelated to labor history,” the study notes, but “historians have assessed in new ways how both the sacred and the secular permeated the workers’ world. . . . Though less formidable than the massive Catholic churches [typical of eastern cities], humbler sites of working-class spiritual and social life deserve consideration.” Such sites include “chapels, taverns, and homes.”¹³

These theme studies thus have their value, but this narrative draws on a wider spectrum of scholarship, including recent studies that offer new examinations of topics such as civil rights activism in the American West, the Bracero Program, and Latino Catholicism during the twentieth century.

U.S. history textbooks rightfully teach the importance of African American civil rights activism in the South during the 1950s, but works such as Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (2003), show that Mexican American civil rights activism had a comparable vitality in the American West during the same decade. More recent works such as Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (2010), have gone a step further, reframing the civil rights movement as not only longer than traditionally understood but also broader. Indeed, the civil rights era not only began long before the 1960s, it encompassed the often-coordinated

¹² Raymond W. Rast, Gail Dubrow, and Brian Casserly, *Cesar Chavez and the Farmworker Movement in the American West*, published as Appendix F in *Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* (San Francisco: National Park Service, Pacific West Region, 2013); Stephen J. Pitti, “The American Latino Heritage,” in *American Latinos and the Making of the United States*, ed. American Latino Scholars Expert Panel (Washington, D.C.: National Park System Advisory Board, 2013), 26; Louis DeSipio, “Demanding Equal Political Voice. . . And Accepting Nothing Less: The Quest for a Latino Political Inclusion,” in *American Latinos*, 277; Zaragoza Vargas, “Latinos Workers,” in *American Latinos*, 204; and Timothy Matovina, “Endurance and Transformation: Horizons of Latino Faith,” in *American Latinos*, 127, 132.

¹³ Waldo E. Martin, et al., *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, 2000), 65-68; Matt Garcia, et al., *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations* (Washington, D.C.: National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, 2000), 90-106; Neil Foley, et al., *Civil Rights in America: Racial Voting Rights* (Washington, D.C.: National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, 2009), 105; Eric Arnesen, et al., *American Labor History* (Washington, D.C.: National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, 2003), 7.

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activism of African Americans, American Latinos, Jewish Americans, Japanese Americans, Native Americans, and other groups in the urban and rural West. For Brilliant and for Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (2011), the CSO illustrated this breadth.¹⁴

Recent studies of the Bracero Program likewise stress the importance of broad coalitions. Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (2011), focuses on the experiences of braceros themselves but credits “a coalition of religious, labor, and liberal activists,” including Ernesto Galarza and unnamed Catholic priests (one of whom most likely was McDonnell), for exposing the Bracero Program as “unjust and immoral” and thus helping secure its termination in 1964. Frank P. Barajas, *Curious Unions: Mexican American Workers and Resistance in Oxnard, California, 1898-1961* (2012), and Lori A. Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (2016), both trace a broader arc, connecting the labor battles of the 1930s to the campaign against the Bracero Program in the 1950s and then to the farmworker movement of the 1960s. Galarza and Chavez were central figures in this arc, but Barajas emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural alliances, and Flores notes how “the Catholic Church, organized labor, and Mexican American civil rights organizations, including the CSO,” united to oppose the abuses of the Bracero Program and to support the rights of farmworkers.¹⁵

The history of Latino Catholicism during the twentieth century also has seen a recent surge in interest. For this narrative statement of significance, Gina Marie Pitti’s dissertation, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’: Ethnicity, Church, and Community Activism in the San Francisco Archdiocese’s Mexican American Colonias, 1942-1965” (2003), is an invaluable source. Pitti shows how the Catholic Church as an institution served as a site for “community mobilization, leadership development, and ethnic identity formation” during the 1950s and thus helped prepare ethnic Mexican Catholics like Cesar Chavez to engage in civil rights, labor rights, and social justice campaigns—including the many battles fought through the CSO, against the Bracero Program, and on behalf of farmworkers. More recent works such as Mario T. García, *Católicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (2008), and Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America’s Largest Church* (2012), affirm the historical importance of ties between Catholicism and Latino activism. Works such as Mario T. García, ed., *The Gospel of César Chávez: My Faith in Action* (2007), and Luis D. León, *The Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez: Crossing Religious Borders* (2015), affirm the particular importance of Catholic faith and spirituality to the life and leadership of Cesar Chavez.¹⁶

These and other recent studies of civil rights, labor rights, and Catholic activist coalitions inform this narrative’s central arguments about the national historical significance of Guadalupe Mission Chapel. During the 1950s, the chapel building provided a crucial space for forging the coalitions that historians and other scholars now emphasize—and this was the same space in which Cesar Chavez began to emerge not only as a community organizer but as a civil rights and labor rights leader. The narrative’s arguments also rest upon primary source

¹⁴ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*; Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Lauren Araiza, *To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farm Workers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), focuses on the 1960s and early 1970s but advances the same argument about the breadth of the civil rights movement(s).

¹⁵ Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 217; Barajas, *Curious Unions*; Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 142. Cohen draws on the scholarship of Gina Marie Pitti, who looks at McDonnell and other priests in Northern California who opposed the Bracero Program.

¹⁶ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 4; Mario T. García, *Católicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America’s Largest Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Mario T. García, ed., *The Gospel of César Chávez: My Faith in Action* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2007); León, *Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez*.

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research, including documents held in regional archives as well as oral history interviews conducted by the author with Father Donald McDonnell, Dolores Huerta, Richard Chavez, Rita Chavez Medina, Herman Gallegos, Luis Valdez, Deacon Salvador Alvarez, and several longtime parishioners.¹⁷

The narrative is organized into five sections. The first three sections examine each of the three trajectories that would begin to intertwine during the early 1950s: ethnic Mexican farm labor and labor organizing efforts in the American West, Catholic ministry to ethnic Mexicans, and the Mexican American civil rights movement. The pivotal fourth section focuses on the chapel building itself and the functions and associations that gave the building national historical significance between 1953 and 1958. The concluding section surveys the ongoing relationship between Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism in the American West after the late 1950s.

The first section, “Cesar Chavez and Migrant Farm Labor in the American West,” focuses on Chavez’s early life, the conditions that shaped the experiences of migrant farmworkers in the American West, and the growth of the ethnic Mexican community in East San Jose before the 1950s. Chavez was born in Arizona in 1927, but his parents lost their homestead when he was just twelve years old. The family moved to California, sought work, and soon experienced the spectrum of harsh realities that shaped the lives of ethnic Mexican migrant farmworkers—including fierce competition for jobs, difficult working conditions, impoverished living conditions, and humiliating discrimination. Like other migrant workers, they responded to these hardships by relying on two sources of stability: their family ties and their Catholic faith. But they were far from the first to experience these realities. Other migrant workers before them had responded to hardships by trying to form labor unions, only to see their efforts crushed by powerful growers who benefitted from government subsidies, immigration policies, and arrangements such as the Bracero Program (which allowed growers to recruit workers from Mexico and use them as strikebreakers). By the late 1940s, growing numbers of working-class Mexican American families—including the extended Chavez family—were sinking roots and building new communities in places like East San Jose. As they continued to grapple with their economic and social marginalization, many of them looked to the Catholic Church for support.

The second section, “Father Donald McDonnell, Mexican Americans, and the Catholic Church,” examines how the American Catholic Church responded to the hardships that ethnic Mexicans faced throughout the American West between the 1920s and the 1950s. World War II was an important turning point. Before the 1940s, ethnic Mexicans faced a degree of marginalization within the institutional Catholic Church. The war years, however, brought heightened interest in the economic, social, and spiritual well-being of ethnic Mexicans and a growing recognition on the part of Catholic officials that many Protestant denominations were making inroads in Mexican American communities. Catholic officials in the Southwest responded by creating the Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking. In East San Jose, Mexican Catholics themselves responded by petitioning Archbishop John Mitty for “a church of their own,” one that would offer Spanish-language services closer to where they lived. Recognizing that braceros and other ethnic Mexican migrant farmworkers had unique needs that established parishes were struggling to meet, Mitty assigned Father Donald McDonnell and three other Spanish-speaking priests to roving positions in California’s East Bay Area, Santa Clara Valley, and northern San Joaquin Valley. McDonnell’s assignment to this “Spanish Mission Band” brought him to East San Jose in 1950. Two years later, Cesar Chavez settled in East San Jose’s oldest barrio, Sal Si Puedes. The two men met and soon formed a lasting bond. “My education started when I met Father Donald McDonnell,” Chavez later noted. Through readings, discussions, and the example of his own missionary work throughout the 1950s, McDonnell taught Chavez that the Catholic faith was an activist faith that called upon its adherents to serve and sacrifice and fight for social justice. This lesson would change the course of Chavez’s life. It would inspire him

¹⁷ The interviews with McDonnell, Huerta, Chavez, and Chavez Medina were conducted as part of the author’s work on the *Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study*.

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not only to build a labor union for farmworkers but to lead a broader movement that would improve countless lives and ultimately transform American society.¹⁸

The third section, “Fred Ross, the CSO, and the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement,” examines how civil rights activists responded to the hardships that ethnic Mexicans faced between the 1920s and the 1950s. Again, World War II was an important turning point. Before the war, civil rights activists formed influential organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), based in Texas, and El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Español, based in Southern California, but these organizations remained divided in terms of membership, politics, and strategy. Wartime injustices such as the Zoot Suit Riots, the wartime service of 350,000 Mexican Americans, and wartime sacrifices on the homefront inspired new activism and a new sense of urgency. Divides within the growing Mexican American civil rights movement remained after the war, but the Community Service Organization (CSO) emerged in Los Angeles in 1947 and began to occupy a political middle ground. The CSO shared an emphasis on citizenship with LULAC and other organizations on the political right, but it also shared an emphasis on inclusivity with the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA) and other organizations on the left. Most importantly, the CSO shared an emphasis on anti-Communism with the Catholic Church, and the CSO’s close relationship with the institutional Church made it the ascendant civil rights organization for ethnic Mexicans during the early Cold War era. Fred Ross’s first efforts to expand the CSO beyond Southern California brought him to East San Jose in 1952, just a few months after Cesar Chavez settled in Sal Si Puedes. Ross met McDonnell, Herman Gallegos, and other civil rights activists, but he formed a lifelong bond with Chavez. “The first practical steps [in the fight for social justice],” Chavez noted, “I learned from the best organizer I know, Fred Ross. I first met him in Sal Si Puedes. He changed my life.” Chavez’s Catholic faith inspired him to take action. Ross began to teach him how. During the 1950s, Ross taught Chavez that marginalized communities could gain power through organization, and they could use this power to secure social justice.¹⁹

The fourth section, “Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel, 1953-1958,” focuses on the chapel building itself, beginning with ethnic Mexican Catholics’ long campaign for “a church of their own” in East San Jose. Father McDonnell supported this campaign, but archdiocesan officials were concerned that a separate parish church for ethnic Mexicans would perpetuate a sense of segregation. McDonnell proposed a semi-autonomous mission chapel as a compromise. In 1953, the priest secured a surplus church building and a plot of land in Sal Si Puedes, and he turned to Cesar Chavez to organize a crew of volunteers who would assist with the work of relocating and reconstructing the building. As McDonnell intended, the chapel building would function as a parish church and a multipurpose center—providing vital space for religious services but also for a credit union, a health clinic, youth activities, and the civil rights activism of the CSO. The building gained national historical significance because of the decades of struggle and perseverance and ultimately the victory it symbolized for ethnic Mexicans in the American West. The chapel building gained additional national historical significance because of its association with Cesar Chavez. The building housed functions that shaped Chavez’s sense of servanthood, spurred his emergence as a community organizer and civil rights leader, and inspired his work as one of the nation’s preeminent labor rights leaders. It was where he began to connect the lessons he learned from Father McDonnell to the lessons he learned from Fred Ross. More broadly, the building connected the Mexican American civil rights movement, the American Catholic Church, and the farmworker movement that Chavez himself would begin to lead in the early 1960s.

The concluding section, “Civil Rights Struggles, La Causa, and the Catholic Church, 1959-1975,” surveys the ongoing relationship between Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism in the American West, with an emphasis on some of the consequences of this relationship through the mid

¹⁸ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 89.

¹⁹ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 93.

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1970s. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Chavez, McDonnell, Galarza, and other activists were united in their efforts to end the Bracero Program and organize farmworkers. These efforts took Chavez to Oxnard and ultimately to Delano, California, where he launched the precursor to the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 1962. McDonnell's and Galarza's efforts met stronger opposition, but a tragic accident that killed thirty-two braceros in 1963 fueled Galarza's final, successful push against the Bracero Program in 1964. Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission continued to grow during these years, gaining new pastoral leadership and independent parish status in 1962. The Guadalupe Parish community remained engaged in civil rights and labor rights advocacy during the 1960s and 1970s, channeling their efforts through civil rights organizations such as the CSO and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) but also through the farmworker movement that Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and others were leading from Delano. Indeed, the farmworker movement received critical support from East San Jose and other urban communities, from ethnic Mexican Catholics, and from the institutional Catholic Church, especially after the Delano strike began in 1965. This support helped secure an end to the Delano strike in 1970 and the passage of California's ALRA in 1975. The broader relationship between Catholicism and La Causa helped drive the early Latinization of the American Catholic Church and ultimately helped shape modern American Latino identity.

Interviewed by Jacques Levy in the early 1970s, Cesar Chavez reflected upon the role that religious faith played in his life during his childhood, teen-age years, and early adulthood. "Since those days," he then noted, "my need for religion has deepened. Today I don't think I could base my will to struggle on cold economics or on some political doctrine. I don't think there would be enough to sustain me. For me," he concluded, "the base must be faith." Four decades later, President Barack Obama celebrated Chavez's "extraordinary achievements and contributions to the history of the United States." In his proclamation establishing the Cesar Chavez National Monument on October 8, 2012, the president attributed Chavez's achievements, in part, to his religious faith. In his remarks that day, the president expressed a hope that visitors to the monument would learn about a man who was "guided by enormous faith—in a righteous cause, a loving God, the dignity of every human being." The story of Chavez's faith, and the larger story of the collective struggles that his faith reflected and sustained, are rooted in Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall) in East San Jose.²⁰

CESAR CHAVEZ AND MIGRANT FARM LABOR IN THE AMERICAN WEST

An examination of Cesar Chavez's early life, the broader conditions that shaped the experiences of migrant farmworkers in the American West, and the growth of the ethnic Mexican community in East San Jose suggests that the battles that would surround Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel during the 1950s were not simply local nor were they narrow in scope. They were battles that would erupt as Cesar Chavez, Father Donald McDonnell, Fred Ross, and others confronted the hardship and discrimination that ethnic Mexicans had faced in California's Santa Clara Valley—and throughout the American West—for more than a century.

The Early Life of Cesar Chavez, 1927-1948

Cesar Chavez was born in 1927 near Yuma, Arizona. Both of his parents had immigrated from Mexico when they were children. When Cesar was born, his father, Librado Chavez, owned a farm and general store twenty miles northeast of Yuma in the North Gila River Valley. His mother, Juana Estrada Chavez, managed the

²⁰ President Barack Obama, "Presidential Proclamation: Establishment of the Cesar E. Chavez National Monument," October 8, 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/08/presidential-proclamation-establishment-cesar-e-chavez-national-monument> (accessed May 30, 2016); President Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Dedication of the Cesar Chavez National Monument, Keene, CA," October 8, 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2012/10/08/president-obama-speaks-dedication-cesar-chavez-national-monument#transcript> (accessed May 30, 2016). Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 27.

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household and cared for Cesar, his older sister Rita, and then Richard and other younger siblings. Their family was not unlike other ethnic Mexican families in the rural Southwest before the Great Depression. Librado and Juana worked hard. They cultivated cotton and other cash crops, operated their general store, tended livestock, cooked and cleaned, and took care of their children and aging parents. The children worked hard, too. Rita helped with meals, laundry, and cleaning. Cesar and Richard helped with the crops and animals. All of them contributed to the life of a tight-knit extended family. Juana's mother, Placida, lived in Yuma until she died in 1930, and Librado's widowed mother, Dorotea, lived on the Chavez homestead until she died in 1937. Several of Cesar's aunts and uncles lived nearby, and the children attended school with many of their cousins.²¹

Growing up in the North Gila Valley, Cesar learned lessons that would stay with him for the rest of his life. Many of these came from Juana, who frequently told her children cuentos (stories with moral lessons), offered them consejos (advice), and taught them dichos (proverbs) that illustrated virtues such as honesty, sacrifice, and nonviolence. Cesar also learned the Catholic faith of his parents and grandparents. Dorotea taught Cesar the mix of beliefs and practices that historian Mario García refers to as abuelita theology—a grassroots theology revolving around devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and various saints, adherence to prayers and rituals (Sunday Masses, Holy Days, Easter and Christmas seasons), and the incorporation of faith into the daily life of the family. Decades later, Cesar would look back on these childhood years with fondness. He would recall long summer days working with his father, having barbecues in the evening, and staying up late as his older relatives talked about life in Mexico. The family had little wealth, even before the Great Depression, but they had stability, and the children enjoyed a sense of security. “We had been poor then, but we had . . . lots of space,” Chavez remembered. “We had a special place we would play, by this tree that was our own. And when we built things—playhouses, bridges, barns—we could come back the next day . . . [knowing] they would be there.”²²

Chavez was too young to comprehend his father's first business failure. Librado had been losing money on the general store he purchased in 1925, and he was forced to sell the business and move his family back to the Chavez homestead in 1929. As Cesar grew older, he became keenly aware of the family's mounting financial problems. Soon after Dorotea died in 1937, a bill for unpaid property taxes and deferred penalties came due. Librado left for Oxnard, California, to look for work as a farmhand. Juana and the children joined him in 1938, giving Cesar his first exposure to the life of a migrant family. “That winter of 1938 I had to walk to school barefoot through the mud, we were so poor,” he later recalled. “After school, we fished in the canal and cut wild mustard greens—otherwise we would have starved.”²³

Cesar relished the family's return to Yuma in 1939, but his father's hopes for earning enough money in California to pay the back taxes were dashed. Their legal options exhausted, the family could only watch as the county seized the homestead and sold it at auction. They received an eviction notice shortly before Cesar's twelfth birthday. As they finished packing, the new owner dispatched a bulldozer to the property. “It was a monstrous thing,” Chavez remembered. “Its motor blotted out the sound of crickets and bullfrogs and the buzzing of flies. As the tractor moved along, it tore up the soil, leveling it, and destroyed the trees, pushing them over like they were nothing. . . . And each tree, of course, means quite a bit to you when you're young. . . . When we saw the bulldozer just uprooting those trees, it was tearing at us too.” The memory of that day—and of the loss of stability tied to a sense of place—would stay with Cesar for the rest of his life.²⁴

²¹ Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 222-23; Richard Chavez, interview; Chavez Medina, interview.

²² García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 19; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 32-33. Chavez quoted in Ronald B. Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 61. See also Studs Terkel, “Cesar Chavez,” in *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1970; New York: Pantheon, 1986), 53.

²³ Chavez quoted in John Gregory Dunne, *Delano*, rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 5.

²⁴ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 41-42. See also Cletus E. Daniel, “César Chávez and the Unionization of California Farm Workers,” in *Labor Leaders in America*, ed. Melvin Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 352.

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Upon losing their homestead the Chavez family rejoined the stream of “Okies” and other migrants moving to California. As they chased rumors of work up and down the state, they confronted the spectrum of harsh realities that shaped migrant farmworkers’ lives, including fierce competition for jobs, difficult working conditions, impoverished living conditions, and humiliating discrimination. They adapted, in part, by developing a seasonal circuit. They spent winters in Brawley, working onions, broccoli, and sugar beets and then carrots, cabbage, and watermelons in early spring. By late spring they would move to Oxnard to work beans, or Beaumont for cherries, or Hemet for apricots. In summer they picked apricots in San Jose, plums in Gilroy, and walnuts in Oxnard before moving to the San Joaquin Valley for beans, corn, and grapes. Every fall they worked in the cotton fields near Delano before returning to Brawley for the winter.²⁵

As they moved from place to place, season after season, they relied on two sources of stability: their family ties and their Catholic faith. Librado and Juana did their best to provide for the children’s material needs, but they prioritized self-respect and family solidarity. If any of them faced abuse in the fields, for example, they would leave the job, even though doing so meant the loss of income. As Chavez later noted, “we were constantly fighting against things that most people . . . accept[ed] because they didn’t have that kind of life we had in the beginning, that strong family life and family ties which we would not let anyone break.” Juana’s emphasis on Catholic teachings also shaped their responses to abuse. Thus when Cesar and Richard faced ridicule for wearing the same clothes to school everyday, they defended themselves with clever retorts instead of their fists. Juana had taught them to turn the other cheek. “God gave you senses like eyes and mind and tongue,” she often said, “and you can get out of anything.”²⁶

Still, the harsh realities that migrant farmworkers faced tested even the strongest families. During their first few seasons in California, the Chavez family learned how fiercely they had to compete for work and how reliant they were on labor contractors, many of whom were unscrupulous and abusive. The family also learned how difficult the work could be. Thinning crops with *el cortito* (the short-handle hoe), Chavez explained with a carefully chosen analogy, was “just like being nailed to a cross. You have to walk twisted, as you’re stooped over, facing the row, and walking perpendicular to it,” he continued. “You are always trying to find the best position because you can’t walk completely sideways, it’s too difficult, and if you turn the other way, you can’t thin.” Intense summer heat, exposure to chemical pesticides, and a lack of restroom facilities compounded such difficulties—and returning home to a tent or tarpaper-and-wood cabin in an overcrowded labor camp offered little relief. Beyond the fields and camps, humiliating discrimination awaited migrant farmworkers, especially ethnic Mexican farmworkers, who routinely faced segregation in movie theaters, eviction from restaurants, and harassment from police officers.²⁷

Like other Mexican Americans finding their way into adulthood during the 1940s, Cesar responded to the conditions his family faced by experimenting with various forms of rebellion. He distanced himself from certain aspects of traditional Mexican culture (such as mariachi music and herbal remedies), but he also rejected American values that emphasized conformity and tolerated discrimination. When Cesar turned nineteen, he sought to escape the fields by joining the U.S. Navy. He enlisted in March 1946 and received an honorable discharge in January 1948. As he turned twenty-one years old, marriage and fatherhood were on the horizon, but he was back in the fields, still searching for a way out.²⁸

²⁵ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 76-77; Terkel, “Cesar Chavez,” 54.

²⁶ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 78, 18. See also Terkel, “Cesar Chavez,” 55.

²⁷ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 74. See also Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: César Chávez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 19-21.

²⁸ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 81-85; Pawel, *Crusades of Cesar Chavez*, 20-22.

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Agricultural Production and Migrant Farmworkers in the American West Before the 1950s

The conditions that the Chavez family confronted in California were typical of those that countless farmworkers faced throughout the American West during the first half of the twentieth century. These experiences were shaped by larger forces and well-established practices within the agriculture industry, including the recruitment and exploitation of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican immigrant workers. Between the 1880s and the 1940s, farmworkers and labor leaders responded to these conditions by organizing labor unions and fighting for improvements. Such efforts, however, faced staunch resistance from growers and their allies.

The forces that would come to shape agricultural production in the American West originated during the period of Spanish colonial rule over Alta California. Beginning in the 1780s, the Spanish crown issued roughly thirty sprawling land grants to Californios who would operate them as ranchlands, often with the coerced labor of former “Mission Indians.” The Mexican government inherited this practice during the 1820s and increased it dramatically. By the time the U.S. took control of the region during the 1840s, the Mexican government had issued more than eight hundred land grants containing a total of eight million acres. During the coming decades, U.S. courts validated three-fourths of these grants, but Anglo American lawyers and bankers gained control of most of them. With railroad magnates and land speculators acquiring additional millions of acres, the trend toward concentrated land holdings became clear, even to distant observers. As Karl Marx noted in 1880, “California is very important for me, because nowhere else has the upheaval most shamelessly caused by capitalist centralization taken place with such speed.” By the turn of the century, two-thirds of all arable land in California (more than twenty million acres) was locked up within fewer than five thousand estates.²⁹

Although Californios had used their land primarily for grazing cattle and sheep, the growing number of American land barons began to focus more on the large-scale cultivation of wheat and other crops. A global collapse of the wheat market during the 1870s prompted a further shift to specialty crops such as sugar beets, fruits, and vegetables. The completion of the transcontinental railroad and the development of refrigerated cars allowed farmers throughout the West to transport such perishable crops to eastern markets, but their large-scale cultivation in California created new demands for irrigation water, rationalized markets, and a seasonal labor force. As the state’s land barons grappled with these needs, they did so less as farmers and more as growers—modern businessmen who turned their sprawling estates into the industrialized operations that Carey McWilliams aptly named “factories in the field.”³⁰

Time after time, the federal government recognized growers’ needs and assisted their efforts. Prior to the 1900s, for example, only large-scale growers with direct access to water and sufficient capital could construct pumps and irrigation ditches. In 1902, however, Congress passed the National Reclamation Act, which would reinvest public lands revenues into regional irrigation projects. These projects were intended to benefit farmers who owned no more than 160 acres, but the Bureau of Reclamation failed to enforce this limit. Construction costs were supposed to be repaid by users over a ten-year period, but this was extended to fifty years. Similarly, operating costs were supposed to be paid through the collection of water-use fees, but these costs were shifted to urban consumers of hydroelectric power generated by dams. The federal government thus subsidized the irrigation water used by large-scale growers—doing so at an average annual rate that approached one hundred thousand dollars per grower by the 1950s.³¹

²⁹ J. Craig Jenkins, *The Politics of Insurgency: The Farm Worker Movement in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 41-44. See also Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (1935; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11-27. Marx quoted in Sam Kushner, *Long Road to Delano* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 5.

³⁰ Jenkins, *Politics of Insurgency*, 44-55; McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields*, passim.

³¹ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 156-88;

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Federal policies that would help rationalize markets were slower to develop. Prior to the 1930s, large-scale growers formed their own cooperatives to negotiate with suppliers and wholesalers, to establish quality grading systems, and to stabilize consumer prices (which otherwise might drop at peak harvest times). Empowered by the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, the federal government supplemented these efforts by organizing new growers' associations and by providing market condition reports to inform pricing and shipment strategies. As historian J. Craig Jenkins has argued, this market rationalization "worked to the advantage of the largest growers." Although all growers benefited from price stabilization efforts, for example, "the larger [growers] used their size advantage to rationalize internal operations," including their relationships with political allies.³²

The most crucial "need" that large-scale growers identified was the need for a skilled yet seasonal (and thus migrant) labor force. Growers sought workers who they could push to their physical limits, pay as little as possible, regulate and isolate as they saw fit, and then turn away at the end of each harvest. Here again the federal government endeavored to act on growers' behalf. Anti-immigrant forces in the West limited this intervention between the 1880s and the 1930s, but assistance from the federal government would reach a clear apex with the establishment and perpetuation of the Program during the 1940s and 1950s.

During the nineteenth century, growers first turned to Chinese immigrants, thousands of whom were drawn to the U.S. by the gold rush but then found work on railroad construction crews. With the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, growers identified newly unemployed Chinese laborers as the "perfect solution" to their growing need for hardworking, cheap, compliant labor. When anti-Chinese sentiment produced the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, growers turned to Japanese immigrants, who also seemed willing to work for low wages, even in the arduous tasks associated with California's expanding sugar beet fields. By the early 1900s, Japanese immigrants comprised roughly one third of California's agricultural labor force, but nativism and racism again led to discriminatory policies and laws, including Theodore Roosevelt's "Gentlemen's Agreement" of 1907, which informally restricted Japanese immigration; California's Alien Land Act of 1913, which denied property rights to Japanese immigrants; and the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924, which applied the ban on Chinese immigration to Japanese and other Asian-origin immigrants. Growers then turned to Filipino immigrants, the one group of Asian-origin immigrants exempted from the 1924 ban by virtue of U.S. conquest and control over the Philippines. Not surprisingly, anti-Filipino hostility was quick to mount, but Filipinos would remain an important segment of the region's agricultural labor force well into the 1960s.³³

Growers also increased their efforts to recruit Mexican immigrants after 1924. Much like Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers, Mexican laborers were thought to be hardworking, cheap, and compliant. Moreover, the proximity of their native country made it even easier for growers to ignore their well-being between harvests. One grower advocate suggested that Mexican migrant workers could simply enjoy "going from crop to crop, seeing Beautiful California, breathing its air, [and] eating its food, [before] finally doing the homing pigeon stunt back to Mexico with more money than their neighbors dreamed existed." The onset of the Great Depression, however, fueled hostility toward Filipino and Mexican farmworkers. Philip Vera Cruz, who immigrated from the Philippines to the U.S. in 1926, recalled that "Filipinos were blamed for taking . . .

Jenkins, *Politics of Insurgency*, 47-51.

³² Jenkins, *Politics of Insurgency*, 53; James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 55-56.

³³ McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 66-80, 110-24; 130-33; Kushner, *Long Road to Delano*, 8-14; Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 26-32; Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 184-87; Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 56-58; Linda Nueva España-Maram, "Negotiating Identity: Youth, Gender, and Popular Culture in Los Angeles's Little Manila, 1920s-1940s," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996) 5, 25.

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Anglos' jobs." The same sentiment was directed toward Mexicans, hundreds of thousands of whom were pressured to leave the U.S. during the 1930s. A newspaper editorial in Brawley captured a prevalent attitude: "The sooner the slogan 'America for Americans' is adopted, the sooner will Americans be given the preference for all kinds of work—instead of aliens."³⁴

The strength of this sentiment grew with the arrival of "Okies" and other white migrants from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Missouri, including roughly seventy thousand who sought work in California's San Joaquin Valley between 1935 and 1940. These newcomers faced some degree of hostility, too, but most Californians felt greater sympathy for their struggles than for those of Filipinos and Mexicans. Dorothea Lange's powerful photographs and John Steinbeck's compelling writing brought even more sympathy—yet white migrant workers in California were only experiencing the hardships and indignities that Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican farmworkers had known for decades. With the outbreak of World War II and the rapid expansion of wartime manufacturing, white migrant workers would have opportunities to leave those hardships behind. Nonwhite farmworkers were not so fortunate.³⁵

The low pay, difficult working conditions, and other hardships that nonwhite farmworkers had faced long before the 1930s—and continued to face during the 1940s and 1950s—sparked recurrent efforts to organize unions and fight for improvements. The first efforts came during the 1880s, when Chinese hop pickers in the San Joaquin Valley went on strike for higher wages. The efforts of Japanese farmworkers were more systematic, but their gains were limited by anti-Japanese sentiment within the broader labor movement. In 1903, for example, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) denied a charter to a union in Oxnard that admitted Japanese sugar beet workers. The AFL's shortcomings hastened the rise of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a radical union that emerged in 1905, faced repression that sparked the Wheatland Riot in 1913, and then foundered amidst the "red scare" associated with World War I. Subsequent efforts were sporadic until the late 1920s, when Mexican farmworkers in California's Imperial Valley formed a union, presented local growers with a list of demands (including a pay increase and drinking water in the fields), and ended up launching a strike. Growers and their allies crushed the strike, but the strike's failure hinted at the consequences of the union's own failure to recruit Filipino farmworkers in the Imperial Valley.³⁶

Labor organizing efforts that crossed racial lines were rare before the 1930s, but then organizers affiliated with the Communist Party (CPUSA) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) began to take a different approach. CPUSA member Pat Chambers, for example, helped organize the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU) in the early 1930s. At the union's founding convention in 1933, its members declared that "any worker in the agricultural industry, including workers in the fields, canneries, and packing sheds," was welcome to join, regardless of race, gender, or religion. The CAWIU led twenty-four strikes that year, including a major cotton strike in the San Joaquin Valley that involved as many as twenty thousand workers (including Mexicans, Filipinos, Japanese Americans, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans). Founded four years later, the CIO-affiliated United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) adopted the same multiracial organizing strategy, with a particular emphasis on the recruitment of women. Its members pledged "never to discriminate against a fellow worker because of creed, color, nationality, religious, or political belief." This union attracted more than 124,000 members by 1940 (including Cesar Chavez's father, Librado), but like the CAWIU, its failure to secure formal recognition from a single

³⁴ Advocate quoted in McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 126. Vera Cruz quoted in Kushner, *Long Road to Delano*, 14. Editorial quoted in Garcia, *World of Its Own*, 72.

³⁵ Gregory, *American Exodus*, 3-70.

³⁶ Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), 20-24, 27-28; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 74, 86-101, 108-09; Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 185-203; Garcia, *World of Its Own*, 51.

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grower foreclosed any long-term success.³⁷

The organizing effort with the greatest potential for long-term success prior to that of the United Farm Workers emerged during the mid 1940s under the leadership of Harry Mitchell. In 1934, Mitchell had co-founded the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Arkansas, but he renamed this union the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) in 1945 and relocated its base of operations to California two years later. Mitchell and other NFLU leaders soon decided to target the DiGiorgio Fruit Company, a corporate land baron that owned more than sixteen thousand acres in the San Joaquin Valley. On behalf of the company's eight hundred year-round employees (and some sixteen hundred seasonal workers), the NFLU demanded union recognition and a union contract with a pay increase, seniority system, and grievance procedures. When DiGiorgio refused, the union launched a strike that would last more than two years. One of the union's rising leaders, Ernesto Galarza, developed important alliances and promising tactics (including the consumer boycott of DiGiorgio products and the secondary boycott of grocery stores that sold those products), yet Galarza knew the strike would not succeed unless the NFLU could cut off DiGiorgio's labor supply. Galarza also knew the Bracero Program made that impossible.³⁸

The U.S. and Mexico signed an agreement creating the Bracero Program in 1942. This wartime arrangement allowed growers to recruit Mexican braceros (laborers) who would take the agricultural jobs that "Okies" and other workers abandoned for manufacturing jobs and military service. For growers, the Bracero Program was an unqualified success. In creating the program, the U.S. promised that growers would pay braceros prevailing wages and provide transportation, meals, and housing. Growers also were supposed to hire braceros only to offset local labor shortages, not to break strikes. Inadequate oversight, however, allowed growers to underpay braceros, provide inadequate meals and housing, and deport any bracero who protested. Growers also discovered they could secure virtually all of the labor they would need at any time, even when local workers went on strike. Not surprisingly, growers lobbied to continue the program well after the end of the war. With the outbreak of the Korean War, Congress passed Public Law 78, extending the program indefinitely. The number of braceros under contract thus grew from a relatively modest total of 4,000 in 1942 to almost 200,000 in 1952. Between 1956 and 1960 (the peak years), the annual average surpassed 400,000.³⁹

Given this direct access to farmworkers who could be exploited and deported as growers saw fit, operations like the DiGiorgio Fruit Company would be able to weather strikes longer than unions like the NFLU could sustain them. The NFLU fought other battles during the late 1940s and early 1950s, including a two-week cotton strike that Cesar Chavez joined in 1949, but growers' ability to use braceros as a strike-breaking force ultimately limited the union's gains. Galarza realized this, and he made termination of the Bracero Program his new mission. Assuming leadership of the NFLU, he renamed it the National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU) and kept it alive until the late 1950s—but he would focus most of his energies on documenting abuses and lobbying against the Bracero Program.⁴⁰

³⁷ Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 129-55, 179-219; McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 218-24; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 30-35; Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 44-55. CAWIU charter quoted in McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 218. On Librado's labor activism see Daniel, "Cesar Chavez," 355; and Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 78-80.

³⁸ Donald H. Grubbs, "Prelude to Chavez: The National Farm Labor Union in California," *Labor History* 16 (1975), 453-69; Ernesto Galarza, *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 14-15; Anne Meister and Dick Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 75-76.

³⁹ Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (Santa Barbara: McNalley and Loftin, 1964); Grubbs, "Prelude to Chavez," 458-64; Kushner, *Long Road to Delano*, 97-109; Jenkins, *Politics of Insurgency*, 78-81; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 121-23. Statistics drawn from Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 91.

⁴⁰ London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 44; David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 156; Dick Meister, "Ernesto Galarza: 'Man On Fire'"

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Galarza also chose to settle in San Jose. There, he would begin to form important alliances with Catholic priests who ministered to braceros, including Father Donald McDonnell, and he would continue to build a foundation for the work of other farmworker advocates, including a young Cesar Chavez.

Sal Si Puedes and the Growth of the Mexican American Community in East San Jose

When Ernesto Galarza settled in San Jose in the late 1940s and took up the fight against the Bracero Program, he became a link between the growing city and the larger, interconnected world in which it existed. So, too, did the braceros themselves, who were coming to the Santa Clara Valley in growing numbers every year to work in the fields and orchards. Yet by the late 1940s, San Jose and the surrounding region had been closely linked to other regions and other nations for well over a century—by Spanish colonial settlement and the spread of Catholicism, by Mexican governance and American conquest, by economic growth and migrant workers' seasonal circuits, and by the emergence of an embattled but vibrant Mexican American community in East San Jose, where the oldest barrio was known as Sal Si Puedes. These broader connections not only shaped the city that Cesar Chavez would move to in the early 1950s, they helped draw him to it. During the decade after the end of World War II, this city was changing rapidly and beginning to confront the challenges of the mid twentieth century.

As historian Stephen Pitti has explained, some of these challenges were tied to the persistence of a social order that was rooted in the Spanish colonial period but truly took hold in the wake of U.S. conquest. Between the 1770s and the 1810s, Spanish settlers in Alta California developed a social hierarchy with those of the “purest” Spanish descent at the top, mestizos and mulatos of mixed-racial descent in the middle, and native Californians at the bottom. The elevated status of Catholic mestizos and “Mission Indians” reflected the overarching importance of Catholicism, of course, but also suggested some degree of fluidity within each rank. Likewise, the regional elites' rejection of a “Mexican” identity and embrace of a “Californio” identity during the 1820s and 1830s suggested the fluidity of the ranks themselves. But then U.S. conquest during the 1840s and a new influx of American settlers triggered a reconfiguration of the social order. For the most part, these white newcomers grouped all Californios, mestizos, and mulatos together as nonwhite “Mexicans” whose blood was surely “tainted” by that of the region's inferior Indians. The fact that most Mexicans were Catholic further suggested their inferiority in the eyes of the mostly Protestant newcomers, and the fact that Americans had defeated Mexicans on the battlefield seemed to confirm that inferiority. The new social order that took hold between the 1850s and the early 1900s thus presupposed that California's ethnic Mexican population—like the nation's Native American population—lacked a strong work ethic, a rightful claim to land, and a capacity for democratic governance. They might serve as manual laborers or domestic workers, but otherwise their presence was undesirable. Their place in American society would be at the margins.⁴¹

By the 1910s, the size of the ethnic Mexican population in the Santa Clara Valley had diminished considerably. At the same time, local agricultural production had shifted from wheat to prunes, peaches, apricots, and other fruits, and the spread of orchards, packing sheds, and canneries fueled a growing demand for workers. Immigration restrictions that targeted Asians and Eastern Europeans made Mexican immigrant workers more attractive—just as the upheaval associated with the Mexican Revolution caused their numbers to rise. Santa Clara County's first sizeable influx of Mexican immigrants thus arrived during the 1920s. Most of these newcomers were migrant workers who simply added the Santa Clara Valley to their seasonal circuits, but those who sought to stay in the area year-round quickly found that the prevailing social order would relegate them to the margins. Not only were Mexican immigrant workers pushed into the lowest-paying jobs, they also were

(2010), <http://www.dickmeister.com/id348.html> (accessed May 30, 2016).

⁴¹ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 8-50.

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pushed into the least desirable residential areas. While most seasonal workers lived in labor camps located throughout the Valley, Mexicans who sought to rent or purchase residential property during the 1920s and 1930s confronted restrictive racial covenants tied to property deeds in the growing residential areas south and west of downtown San Jose. The only areas open to Mexican families were located in the unincorporated, windswept tracts of land located several miles to the east.⁴²

Land to the east of the original pueblo of San Jose comprised the ejido (commons), which any settler could use for grazing cattle, gathering firewood, and other needs. Developers who purchased this land during the 1870s subdivided it for resale, but residential growth was limited because the soil quality was poor and better land was readily available elsewhere. A small number of Puerto Rican farmworkers who arrived during the 1910s finally began to build houses in the area, and the presence of these Spanish-speaking residents helped attract the first Mexican families during the 1920s. Even as the population grew, however, East San Jose retained a rural character reminiscent of other small California towns. Modest houses with chicken coops and outhouses in the rear were scattered along unpaved roads that lacked sewers, street lights, and sidewalks. Several small barrios began to form, and the name of the oldest, Sal Si Puedes (get out if you can), offered a wry commentary on the muddy condition of its roads after a rainstorm as much as the limited prospects of its residents.⁴³

Given their marginalization, the fact that Mexican immigrant families in East San Jose remained oriented toward each other—and toward Mexico—during the 1920s and 1930s is not surprising. Many of these early residents developed strong ties to each other through their shared Catholic faith and commitment to *compadrazgo* (co-parenting with godparents). While Eastside Catholic families began to desire a church of their own, other families established a local Baptist church and a local Pentecostal church, each with services in Spanish. Many barrio residents also maintained memberships in local lodges, clubs, and mutualistas (mutual aid societies). Less formally, they helped each other with cooking and childcare needs, they shared information about job opportunities, they gathered to celebrate Mexican holidays, and they often discussed the struggles they faced as Mexicans living in the U.S. Many of them found comfort in shared memories of life in Mexico, and many anticipated a time when they might return. The Great Depression and a new wave of anti-Mexican hostility created a new context for such decisions. During the 1930s, in fact, deportation campaigns pressured hundreds of thousands of Mexican families to leave the U.S. for Mexico. Of four thousand ethnic Mexicans living in the San Jose area in the early 1930s, perhaps one-third joined this exodus.⁴⁴

Those who stayed were more likely to acknowledge and cultivate ties not only to San Jose but to California and the nation as a whole, yet these families had to endure significant hardships during the 1930s, including long periods of unemployment resulting in malnutrition and poor health, especially among their children. Such hardships were compounded by ongoing neglect from city and county officials. Eastside roads remained unpaved and unlit, police and fire protection was inadequate, the schoolhouse was antiquated, the creek that cut through the area often flooded, and there were no parks or playgrounds. The lack of sewers (and the prevalence of outhouses and cess pools) often filled the air with mosquitoes and a stench that attracted rats. Labor organizers tried to mobilize local employees of the Mayfair Packing Company (opened in 1931), and they began to lobby for improvements in what was becoming known as the “Mayfair district,” but their efforts fell short. World War II then brought new economic growth to San Jose and new hope for improvements in the Mayfair district. Public officials, however, continued to overlook the area, and the economic gulf between Mexican families and the white population only grew wider. The war also brought new population growth in the Eastside barrios (including the first influx of *braceros*), and overcrowding soon made matters worse.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 80-92. See also Clark, *Health*, 13.

⁴³ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 90; Clark, *Health*, 13. For photographic documentation of the physical landscape, see Nannette Regua and Arturo Villarreal, *Mexicans in San José* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), *passim*.

⁴⁴ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 96-97, 106-08.

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Frustrations mounted during the 1940s, but the Mexican American community would not be able to bring improvements to East San Jose without better organization, grassroots leadership, and political leverage.⁴⁵

Cesar Chavez first joined this community in 1939, not long after his parents lost their homestead in Arizona. Working near Salinas that summer, his father had heard there were jobs in San Jose. The family drove north, found their way to the Eastside, and arrived in Sal Si Puedes—a barrio crowded, in Cesar’s words, with “shabby shacks and old houses with outside privies” but surrounded by open fields. They rented a bedroom from a homeowner in Sal Si Puedes and then spent several months harvesting fruit in nearby orchards, cutting apricots for the Mayfair Packing Company, and trying to save some money before moving on. Nine years later, Cesar’s parents and siblings were back in East San Jose, and soon after his discharge from the Navy in January 1948, Cesar decided to join them.⁴⁶

Cesar turned twenty-one years old in March 1948. He courted and married Helen Fabela that year, and when they arrived in East San Jose, she was pregnant with their first child, Fernando. The Eastside barrios had the same shabby houses and unpaved streets that Cesar remembered, but the ethnic Mexican population in the area had grown from perhaps 4,000 in the late 1930s to almost 8,000 a decade later. Cesar’s brother, Richard, tried to help Cesar get steady work in apricots, but the growth in population had intensified the competition for jobs. Cesar and his parents started sharecropping strawberries in the nearby foothills early in 1949, and they stayed with it for a year and a half before acknowledging they would never do more than break even. Searching for work again in fall 1950, Cesar decided to join one of his cousins in Crescent City, California (near the Oregon border), where they could make good money as lumber handlers. Richard, their brother-in-law Joe (Rita’s husband), and two other cousins went as well, and their wives and children followed. Cesar worked hard and began to save some money. Still, Helen soon gave birth to their third child, they grew tired of the rain, and they missed life in East San Jose.⁴⁷

They decided to return to Sal Si Puedes in spring 1952, and this time they would stay for six years. Cesar, Helen, and their growing family moved into a small house his parents owned on Scharff Avenue, and Cesar landed another job as a lumber handler for a local box manufacturer. As this pivotal period in his life began, Cesar was making his way out of the fields and orchards, but he still faced the prospect of falling into the cycle of poverty, cynicism, and despair that had trapped countless young men from migrant farmworker families. The prospects of the larger Mexican American community of East San Jose were similarly bleak. In the early 1950s, the men and women of East San Jose worked hard, cared for their children, helped their neighbors, took pride in their culture, and tried to live their faith. Yet these families continued to struggle with discrimination, poverty, inadequate education, poor health, and little hope for improvement. Cesar Chavez faced a turning point in the early 1950s. The community to which he belonged faced a turning point, too.

FATHER DONALD MCDONNELL, MEXICAN AMERICANS, AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Father Donald McDonnell would teach Cesar Chavez that his Catholic faith was an activist faith that called upon its adherents to fight for social justice. This lesson would change the course of Chavez’s life—and it would inspire him not only to build a labor union for farmworkers but to lead a broader movement that would improve countless lives and ultimately transform American society. McDonnell’s work likewise would empower other members of East San Jose’s ethnic Mexican Catholic community, especially those who were

⁴⁵ Ibid., 91, 105, 109, 118-24.

⁴⁶ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 50.

⁴⁷ Pawel, *Crusades*, 22; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 148; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 88; Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 82; Chavez Medina, interview.

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building their own capacity to affect change beyond the Church. Their successes would resonate throughout the American West and beyond, for decades to come.

Mexican Americans and the American Catholic Church Before World War II

The deportation campaigns that had accompanied the onset of the Great Depression limited the overall growth of the Mexican-descent population in the U.S. during the 1930s. The population fell from 1.7 million in 1930 to perhaps 1.2 million by the mid 1930s, then climbed again toward 2 million by 1940. Ninety percent of this population lived in California and the Southwest, where it was marginalized and impoverished. This population also was predominantly Catholic, and just as Catholic faith sustained Mexican immigrant families through their individual struggles, traditional Mexican Catholic practices and beliefs helped unite them as a community. But Mexican Catholics were marginalized not only in the U.S. economy and in American society, they were marginalized within the institutional Catholic Church as well, and many began to drift away. When World War II began, Catholic leaders were debating how to respond to what they called “the Mexican problem.”⁴⁸

The beginning of World War II sparked economic growth throughout the American West, but because the benefits were unevenly distributed, the gulf between the ethnic Mexican population and the region’s majority white population only grew wider. Mexican workers faced the specific challenges of difficult labor and low pay, of course, but regardless of their economic status, all Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans were likely to face discrimination in hiring and promotion, segregation in housing and schools, and restricted access to restaurants and other places of public accommodation. Two events in the early 1940s reflected the treatment ethnic Mexicans received from the region’s criminal justice systems. In August 1942, the Los Angeles Police Department found the body of a murder victim, José Díaz, near a popular swimming hole known as the Sleepy Lagoon. Amidst calls for a crack down on Mexican gang activity, more than six hundred suspected gang members were arrested, twenty-two were indicted on various charges, and seventeen were convicted—three for first-degree murder—despite a lack of evidence confirming their guilt. In June 1943, the so-called “Zoot Suit Riots” saw mobs of military servicemen stationed in Los Angeles attacking, stripping, and humiliating young Mexican Americans dressed in zoot suits. Law enforcement officers did little to protect the victims of these attacks, and the local media amplified suggestions that zoot suiters themselves were to blame. Later that year, an investigating committee chaired by Bishop Joseph McGucken of Los Angeles concluded that the riots “were caused principally by racial prejudice, which was stimulated by police practices and inflammatory news reporting.”⁴⁹

Given the mistreatment that Mexican immigrants received from Catholic officials during prior decades, McGucken’s sympathy signaled an important shift in sentiment. During the 1910s and 1920s, many Catholic leaders saw Mexican immigrants as a growing burden. A 1923 report issued by the Associated Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, for example, observed that “they come by the thousands, unheralded and unknown,” and they “often have no address . . . living as they do in huts and shacks . . . or anything [else] they can find.” Catholic leaders complained that most of these immigrants arrived without any formal religious instruction, did not attend Mass regularly, and could not be relied upon to support their parishes. At the same time, they created significant demands on charitable services everywhere they went. San Francisco Archbishop Edward Hanna lent more weight to this sentiment a few years later. Speaking as chairman of the California State Commission

⁴⁸ Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnolde De León, *North to Aztlán: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 64, 85-87. The U.S. Census provides precise population numbers, but scholars question their accuracy and suggest higher population totals.

⁴⁹ Neil Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 121-30. McGucken quoted in Jeffrey M. Burns, “The Mexican Catholic Community in California,” in *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 198.

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on Immigration and Housing, Hanna observed that Mexican immigrants not only “drain our charities,” they and their children “become a large portion of our jail population, affect the health of our community, create a problem in our labor camps, require special attention in our schools and are of low mentality, diminish the percentage of our white population, and remain foreign.” Such statements helped justify the deportation campaigns of the early 1930s.⁵⁰

The American Catholic Church as a whole was growing in size and strength during these decades, especially in California. In 1920, the Archdiocese of San Francisco counted 365,000 Catholics, the Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles counted 214,000, and the Diocese of Sacramento counted 48,000. By 1940, the Archdiocese of San Francisco counted 443,000 Catholics, the new Archdiocese of Los Angeles counted 328,000, the Diocese of Sacramento counted 128,000, the new Diocese of San Diego counted 142,000, and the Diocese of Monterey-Fresno counted 82,000. Overall, 1.2 million Catholics lived in California in 1940, and they supported a growing number of parishes, priests, and seminaries as well as schools, hospitals, and other charitable institutions. Across the nation, Catholic leaders used the Church’s growing strength to advocate for workers and working-class families. Father John Ryan, for example, became the director of the National Catholic Welfare Conference’s Social Action Department in 1919. Inspired by papal encyclicals that established modern Catholic social doctrine, the Irish American priest used his position to call for a federal minimum wage, unemployment insurance, health and retirement benefits, and the right to organize labor unions. With the onset of the Great Depression, Ryan’s advocacy grew more forceful. As historian Marco Prouty has explained, Ryan’s early endorsement of Franklin D. Roosevelt, his hand in the creation of Roosevelt’s Social Security programs, and his own presence on the national stage helped move Catholicism “from a marginalized faith group into mainstream America.”⁵¹

Unfortunately, the ethnic Mexican population in California and the Southwest played no meaningful role in shaping or otherwise responding to the growth of the institutional Church, and the advocacy efforts of Catholic leaders such as Father Ryan ignored the specific challenges that Mexican immigrant workers faced in the West. The Archdiocese of San Francisco (which included San Jose) offers a case study. Between 1905 and 1945, a total of 462 priests served in the archdiocese. Despite the growth of California’s Mexican-descent population, the archdiocese did not ordain a single ethnic Mexican priest during this entire forty-year period. Only one priest who served the archdiocese during these decades was trained in Spain. None were trained in Mexico. A majority of priests were ordained in the U.S. (rather than Ireland, as before), but those who were trained in the archdiocese were required to study German rather than Spanish. Thus not only were Mexican Catholics marginalized in the U.S. economically and socially, they were marginalized within the institutional Catholic Church as well—especially those who did not speak English. “Except as people sitting passively in the pews,” historian Moises Sandoval notes, “Hispanics had virtually no institutional representation in the Church.” In the words of Salvador Alvarez, Mexican Catholics in the U.S. were “a people without a clergy.”⁵²

The attention that Mexican Catholics did receive within the Church before the 1940s was informed, in part, by a desire to “Americanize” them. Since the late nineteenth century, Catholic leaders throughout the Southwest had discouraged numerous practices and beliefs associated with Mexican Catholicism, including fiestas tied to Holy Days, the healing rituals associated with curanderas, the veneration of saints, and the distinctive Mexican devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mary, the mother of Jesus, as she appeared to an Indian named Juan Diego

⁵⁰ 1923 report quoted in Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 155; Hanna quoted in Moises Sandoval, *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 44.

⁵¹ Salvador E. Alvarez, “The Roots of Mestizo Catholicism in California,” in *Fronteras: A History of the Latin American Church in the USA Since 1513*, ed. Moises Sandoval (San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1983), 239-40; Marco G. Prouty, *César Chávez, The Catholic Bishops, and the Farmworkers’ Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 12-14.

⁵² Sandoval, *On the Move*, 61; Alvarez, “Roots of Mestizo Catholicism,” 242-43. The Archdiocese of San Francisco encompassed San Jose until the 1980s.

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near Mexico City in 1531). These folk practices and beliefs went beyond the boundaries of Church doctrine, but many Catholic leaders also thought they exposed the Church as a whole to ridicule from Anglo American Protestants. Catholic leaders thus wanted Mexican Catholics to become good American Catholics; more generally, they wanted Mexican immigrants to assimilate and become good American citizens. A 1919 report of the Associated Catholic Charities of Los Angeles suggested that the two goals were intertwined: “We believe that in making them better Catholics, we shall make them better citizens.”⁵³

Ultimately, the condescension, marginalization, and misguided “Americanization” efforts that Mexican Catholics faced during the 1920s and 1930s reflected a pervasive sense of Anglo American superiority and Mexican inferiority. As historian Jeffrey Burns has argued, “the overwhelming source of social distance between the Mexican and the Church was the racism the Mexican American experienced in the American Church. The marginalized, segregated position Mexicans occupied in American society was simply reinforced by Church practice. Rather than experiencing the Church as refuge and mother, too often the Mexican experienced the same degradations and humiliations he or she had received at the hands of American society.” The parish history of San Salvador Parish near Riverside, California, for example, acknowledges that “Mexicans were discriminated against in their own church. On Sundays, the priest would ask them to wait outside the church until the Americans had entered. Then he would allow them to find places for themselves in the back.” Burns notes that the sight of “Mexicans Only” signs attached to the last few pews of a church was common throughout the Southwest.⁵⁴

By the early 1940s, Catholic leaders were aware that the number of Mexican Catholics in the U.S. was growing, and so were the tensions associated with their mistreatment. Three developments informed their earliest responses to “the Mexican problem.” First, the outbreak of World War II heightened the importance of the Roosevelt Administration’s “Good Neighbor” policy. Following several years of conciliatory efforts, the U.S. in 1941 sought Mexican approval for the reciprocal use of air bases and port facilities. In return, Mexico sought better treatment for Mexican diplomats, the small but growing number of Mexican braceros, and all other ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. Second, the injustices of the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots generated a widespread mix of embarrassment, anxiety, and anger, and many Catholics called upon the Church to intercede. At a conference sponsored by the National Catholic Welfare Conference a few weeks after the violence in Los Angeles, Archbishop Robert Lucey of San Antonio asked pointedly, “Are we good neighbors?” Lucey and other Catholic leaders questioned whether the U.S. could “assume the moral leadership of the world when race riots and murder, political crimes and economic injustices disgrace the very name of America.” Third, and perhaps most important, several Protestant denominations began making inroads among Mexican Catholics who actively resented their own mistreatment within the Church but also those who simply felt neglected and began to drift away. By the 1940s, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and even Pentecostals had established churches with Spanish-language services among Mexican communities in San Antonio, Los Angeles, San Jose, and other cities. These Protestant inroads, historian Gina Pitti notes, were “the single most important stimulus to Catholic missionary activities” during the 1940s and 1950s—including activities that would be associated with the Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking, the San Francisco Archdiocese’s “Spanish Mission Band,” Father Donald McDonnell, and Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel in East San Jose.⁵⁵

The Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking and the Growing Desperation in East San Jose

As World War II unfolded, Catholic leaders began to respond to the missionary work that Protestants were

⁵³ Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 135-37, 179-80, 150.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 131-32. See also Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America*, 77-78.

⁵⁵ Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America*, 64-80, 91-95; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 197-200; García, *Católicos*, 112-19; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 38. Lucey quoted in García, *Católicos*, 116.

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undertaking, the injustices that ethnic Mexicans continued to face, and the broader need for wartime unity with the transnational Mexican population. Among the Catholic officials who responded with some sense of urgency, Archbishop Robert Lucey was the most prominent. His work would lead to the formation of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking.

Ordained in 1916, Lucey served in Los Angeles during the 1920s and emerged as a public advocate for workers and working-class families. When he became Bishop of Amarillo, Texas, in 1934, his advocacy focused more specifically on Mexican immigrant families who faced bitter anti-Mexican and anti-Catholic hostility in and around the city. After Lucey became Archbishop of San Antonio in 1941, he began to carry his advocacy from the local and regional levels to the national level. As historian Gilberto Hinojosa explains, Lucey “startled his fellow bishops at national conferences by criticizing the American Church for espousing a spirituality based solely on individual virtues, exclusive of social justice.” In 1943, Lucey organized the conference in San Antonio where more than fifty Catholic leaders from the West and Midwest gathered to discuss obstacles to transnational wartime unity—and Lucey’s critique of the nation’s shortcomings as a “good neighbor” set the tone. The San Antonio conference and another the next year in Denver provided the foundation for the formation of the Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking (BCSS) in 1945. The BCSS, historian Mario García emphasizes, was “the first national organization within the U.S. Catholic Church to specifically focus on the Latino Catholic community.” Under Lucey’s leadership, the organization developed an agenda revolving around social services and religious instruction for Mexican Catholics as well as advocacy on behalf of Mexican American rights, including staunch opposition to all forms of discrimination and segregation. The BCSS launched its work in Los Angeles, Denver, Santa Fe, and San Antonio, with plans to encourage similar efforts in other provinces.⁵⁶

Some Catholic officials kept their distance from the BCSS. Bishop Aloysius Willinger of the Monterey-Fresno Diocese, for example, resented the implication that he was not doing enough to serve Mexican Catholics. “The Mexican question is my problem and as to the solution,” Willinger wrote to Lucey, “I will stand on my record.” Like other officials, Archbishop John Mitty of San Francisco was more receptive, but the “no-nonsense New Yorker” also wanted more time to assess Lucey’s strategies. In 1948, he sent two priests, John Ralph Duggan and a newly-ordained 24-year-old, Donald McDonnell, to the annual BCSS conference. This national conference and then a series of conferences at the local level in 1949 would provide the framework for their own missionary activities within the sprawling Archdiocese of San Francisco, which extended south to encompass San Jose and the rest of Santa Clara County.⁵⁷

By the late 1940s, ethnic Mexican Catholic families in East San Jose were no longer content to wait for Mitty to act. Catholics living in the Eastside barrios in the 1940s were within the territorial jurisdiction of St. Patrick’s Parish, located three miles west in downtown San Jose, but the distance and the lack of a Spanish-speaking priest kept their involvement in this parish to a minimum. Two other parishes began to offer weekly Masses with Spanish sermons that drew several hundred people, but these were “national” parishes established for specific immigrant communities—Holy Family for Italians and Five Wounds for Portuguese Catholics—and Mexican families did not always feel welcomed. At the same time, the number of Protestant churches with Spanish-language services in East San Jose grew from two to ten, and many Mexican Catholics who had drifted away from the Church began to join these new congregations. Father John García, who would work alongside McDonnell and Duggan in the years to come, later explained that Mexican Catholics in East San Jose and elsewhere “felt it was futile to try to be Catholic. They felt no sense of belonging to anything.” For McDonnell,

⁵⁶ Gilberto M. Hinojosa, “Mexican American Faith Communities in Texas and the Southwest,” in *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church*, ed. Dolan and Hinojosa, 111; Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 71-72; García, *Católicos*, 119-25.

⁵⁷ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 29-31. On Mitty’s New York roots see Kevin Starr, *The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131. Willinger quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 29.

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it was no surprise that Mexican Catholics “feel that they can ‘hear about God in Spanish’ just as well in the Protestant church . . . just a few doors away from their homes” as in the Catholic church several miles away.⁵⁸

Still, a sociologist who studied East San Jose in the early 1950s found that the majority of ethnic Mexicans in the Mayfair district remained Catholic, and among the different barrios, Sal Si Puedes stood out as “overwhelmingly Catholic.” In the mid 1940s, a group of devout Catholics in this barrio recruited a Spanish-speaking priest to celebrate Mass in neighborhood homes (most likely Louis Kern, a Jesuit), but ultimately they wanted Archbishop Mitty to provide a church and approve a permanent pastor position. While they continued to wait for Mitty’s support, they secured an agreement in 1948 to rent a dilapidated social hall in Sal Si Puedes two days a week. Tremont Hall, as it was known, was built by Puerto Ricans who settled in East San Jose during the 1910s. Its primary function in the 1940s revolved around burial services, but it was the only non-residential building in the entire barrio that was suitable for Mass, religious instruction, and other services. Around the same time, a naval chaplain donated a portable Mass kit to the community, making it possible to celebrate Mass in a non-consecrated building. Local residents also secured Father Kern’s agreement to celebrate Mass in Tremont Hall once a month, pending approval from his Jesuit superiors and Archbishop Mitty.⁵⁹

Mitty was open to these arrangements, but he also was assessing the strategies of the BCSS. As Gina Pitti explains, Mitty wanted a “comprehensive, archdiocesan-wide strategy” for Mexican ministry rather than a “neighborhood-by-neighborhood approach.” In August 1949, Mitty bought some time by sending Father McDonnell to investigate the specific needs of the Mayfair district. After meeting with Leta Elizondo and other lay leaders, McDonnell concluded that “the situation is desperate,” but he also advised against approving any permanent arrangements until the broader strategy was developed. Still insistent, Elizondo and six other leaders submitted a petition to Mitty in 1950 that nearly 2,500 Mexican Catholics living in East San Jose had signed. They explained their desperation in their own words:

For years it has been the longing of many of the Spanish-speaking families in this city . . . [to have] a church of their own where they can worship God according to their traditions and customs, give special honor to . . . Our Lady of Guadalupe, have easy access to confession in their own language, . . . understand the sermons, . . . receive the sacrament of matrimony through a priest of their own race . . . who can also read to them in Spanish those parts of the liturgy that may be recited in the vernacular and, finally, where they can feel at ease in a church of their own, without fear of humiliations due to racial discrimination which unfortunately still exists even among some Catholics.

Mexican Catholics in Sal Si Puedes and beyond wanted “a church of their own.” They wanted a national parish with a Latino pastor and Spanish-language services, and their petition conveyed these requests. Considered in its context, however, the petition also was a powerful response to several decades of mistreatment that had come to define the relationship between ethnic Mexicans and the institutional Catholic Church, not only in San Jose but throughout California and the Southwest.⁶⁰

The Spanish Mission Band in Northern California, 1950-1951

Before World War II, the American Catholic Church generally expected the Catholic faithful to find their own

⁵⁸ García and McDonnell quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 42.

⁵⁹ Clark, *Health*, 46, 97, 99; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 177. The only other non-residential structures in Sal Si Puedes in the late 1940s were a small grocery store and an elementary school on Jackson Avenue, which Clark described as “an ancient two-story wooden relic of the 1870s.” Tremont Hall (also known as Puerto Rican Hall) was located on Tremont Street near Jackson Avenue. It was demolished in the 1960s.

⁶⁰ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 176-78, 192. McDonnell quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 176. Petition quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 178.

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way to their designated parishes and simply become active members. This was difficult for impoverished, Spanish-speaking Catholics who lived in places like East San Jose, where the parochial church was not only located several miles away but also lacked Spanish-language services. After the war, the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking began to respond to such challenges with a greater emphasis on Spanish language instruction for clergy and the recruitment of Spanish-speaking lay leaders. But if these challenges were difficult for ethnic Mexicans who settled in urban barrios, they were all but insurmountable for Mexican migrant farmworkers—including a growing number of braceros—who moved from place to place every few months. Thus while the requests from East San Jose informed Archbishop Mitty's desire for a strategy of Mexican ministry, recognition of the need to minister more effectively to migrant farmworkers finally pushed him to act and, in doing so, to innovate.⁶¹

The U.S. and Mexico had created the Bracero Program in 1942 as a wartime measure, but its true impact only became clear after the war, when growers lobbied to continue the program year after year and the annual number of braceros entering the U.S. grew to the hundreds of thousands (with perhaps equal numbers of undocumented immigrants entering the country or remaining after the termination of their bracero contracts). During the late 1940s, thousands of ethnic Mexican farmworkers labored in the fields and orchards of the Santa Clara Valley, as they had done during the 1920s and 1930s. But now the numbers of braceros and undocumented workers were growing, and these migrant farmworkers were particularly vulnerable to mistreatment from employers, discrimination away from the fields, and even disrespect from local Mexican Americans who viewed them as "outsiders." As McDonnell and other priests throughout California and the Southwest confirmed, these workers also were the least likely to have any connection to the institutional Catholic Church. Archbishop Mitty therefore sought a comprehensive strategy for Mexican ministry that would build upon the approach of the BCSS but go even further in serving the spiritual and social needs of all ethnic Mexican Catholics—including braceros and other migrant farmworkers.⁶²

The idea to designate a small number of priests and empower them to attend to Mexican ministry throughout the Archdiocese of San Francisco emerged during a series of conferences that Donald McDonnell and John Duggan convened in 1949. Participating clergy recognized that the marginalization of ethnic Mexicans was an ongoing problem, but the solution required more than Spanish language instruction for clergy and religious instruction for ethnic Mexican Catholics. John García, one of the few priests who had spent time among migrant farmworkers in their labor camps, noted that he was the only priest many braceros had seen since leaving Mexico. Duggan likewise stressed the importance of "direct contact with the people" in their homes and in labor camps but also at their social gatherings, in the fields, in jails—anywhere they could be found. This innovative strategy for Mexican ministry was formalized in summer 1950, when McDonnell and Duggan presented a proposal to Mitty. If he would release four priests from parochial duties, they would minister to ethnic Mexican Catholics throughout the archdiocese. They would perform missions, celebrate Masses, hear confessions, teach catechism, and support the development of lay leaders but also advocate for the civil rights and labor rights of ethnic Mexicans, as guided by Catholic social doctrine. Mitty agreed to the proposal, and he labeled the four priests—McDonnell, Duggan, García, and Thomas McCullough—the Spanish Mission Band.⁶³

Of the four, McDonnell and McCullough had known each other the longest. Both were born into working-class Irish American families in the early 1920s, and their fathers were active in labor unions in the San Francisco

⁶¹ García, *Católicos*, 121-25; Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 207-10; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 82-83.

⁶² Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 209-15; Foley, *Mexicans in the Making of America*, 134-35. On those who viewed braceros as outsiders see Clark, *Health*, 16-17.

⁶³ Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 215-16; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 52-54; McDonnell, interview; John Duggan, "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is" (unpub. ms., 1984), 14, <https://libraries.ucsd.edu/farmworkermovement/essays/essays/John%20Duggan%20Autobiography.pdf> (accessed May 30, 2016).

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Bay Area. They met as classmates in a parochial school in Berkeley, and as teenagers they both attended St. Joseph's College in Mountain View before deciding to study for the priesthood at St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park. Duggan and García were two of their classmates at St. Patrick's in the early 1940s. Together they took courses in social justice, developed their understanding of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and other papal encyclicals establishing modern Catholic social doctrine, and gathered in the evenings to discuss new developments within Catholicism such as the Catholic Worker movement that Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day had launched in 1933. The four seminarians also carved out time together to improve their command of Spanish. McDonnell had learned Spanish from a Mexican classmate at St. Joseph's College, so he led evening strolls during which the men would quiz each other and converse in Spanish. Duggan was ordained in 1945, and he was assigned to St. Mary's Parish in Oakland, where Father Charles Philipps had made Mexican ministry a parish priority. Duggan also spent six months in Mexico improving his Spanish and developing sympathy for Mexican perspectives on the U.S. After the other three men were ordained in 1947, Duggan and McDonnell drove from San Francisco to New York City to spend time with Dorothy Day and learn more about the Catholic Worker movement. They also committed to advocating for Mexican ministry at the archdiocesan level. McCullough and García (the son of Mexican immigrant farmworkers) were eager to join them.⁶⁴

The Archdiocese of San Francisco covered some 14,000 square miles, so the four priests agreed to divide up the seven counties with the largest ethnic Mexican populations. Duggan took Alameda County, McDonnell took Santa Clara and San Mateo, McCullough took San Joaquin and Stanislaus, and García took Contra Costa and Solano. Then they had to determine how they would begin serving more than 100,000 ethnic Mexicans living in these counties, plus 20,000 to 40,000 migrant farmworkers—including growing numbers of braceros—who spent three to six months working in the Santa Clara Valley and northern San Joaquin Valley every year. Initially the priests operated out of St. Patrick's Seminary, but they soon decided to establish centers of operation in several locations, including San Jose, Hayward, and Stockton. They also began visiting labor camps, walking through barrios, and knocking on doors with much greater frequency. As Gina Pitti explains, they embraced "Protestant proselytizing strategies that had proven successful." Eschewing a parish-centric strategy, they showed up on doorsteps, "introducing themselves and taking informal censuses of the neighborhood." And, of course, they began to incorporate Spanish-language services and specific aspects of Mexican culture into their ministry. As Duggan recalled, McDonnell and McCullough insisted that for most ethnic Mexicans the Mass was "meaningless in Latin, and the hymns and music in vogue equally so." The priests thus recruited lay leaders to translate Latin passages into Spanish, they played Mexican music during the Mass, and they even composed their own new hymns in Spanish.⁶⁵

McDonnell and McCullough began spending a significant amount of time in the labor camps of the Santa Clara Valley and San Joaquin Valley every year, especially between June and November (when harvests heightened the demand for workers). At the outset of their ministry, McDonnell counted twenty-two labor camps just within a ten-mile radius north and west of San Jose, but the total number of camps in these two priests' territory climbed well into the hundreds—and the camps ranged in size, with some housing twenty to thirty braceros and others housing as many as two hundred families. The demands that shaped these migrant workers' lives required an innovative response from McDonnell and McCullough. As Gina Pitti notes, the work week at the local packing plants began on Monday, so those who labored in the fields had to work a full day on Sundays, harvesting the produce that would be packed the next day. This made it difficult to simply celebrate Mass on Sunday mornings, so McDonnell and McCullough had to improvise. In 1952, a report from the National Catholic Rural Life Council summarized their approach: "The priest drives into a camp at sundown, rings a bell,

⁶⁴ McDonnell, interview; Duggan, "My Mind," 8-16; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 79-83. Duggan would leave the Spanish Mission Band in 1955, and Father Ronald Burke, another classmate from St. Patrick's Seminary, would replace him.

⁶⁵ Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 52-53, 253; Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 216; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 83; Duggan, "My Mind," 16-17.

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brings the folks together, recites the rosary, gives them a sermon, hears confessions, sleeps in the camp and offers Mass the next morning at four or five o'clock." The priests repeated this routine several days a week.⁶⁶

The Spanish Mission Band hoped that individual parishes would follow their example and assume responsibility for the labor camps in their territory, but after several years the priests saw that most of the burden still fell on their own shoulders. Given their own limited capacity, their efforts in the camps ultimately would prove inadequate. In the short term, however, their efforts were eye-opening. "More important than the services that the priests rendered," Pitti concludes, "was the knowledge they gained. As pastors like McCullough and McDonnell brought the sacraments to the fields, they emerged with an intimate understanding of the daily injustices of the Bracero Program and its adverse effects on workers." At the outset of their ministry, the Spanish Mission Band priests understood Mexican Catholics' social and material needs but prioritized their spiritual needs. Exposure to the conditions of the labor camps, however, would convince them to prioritize those social and material needs—especially those of braceros and other ethnic Mexican workers who faced the injustices of the nation's agricultural labor system.⁶⁷

Even as their priorities evolved, the Spanish Mission Band priests knew their limited numbers would prevent them from reaching as many Catholic faithful as they would have liked. They responded, in part, by developing Spanish-language radio programs. Father Luis Almendáres's show, "The Catholic Conference," already was popular in San Francisco and Oakland when McDonnell introduced "Cristo Rey," a short broadcast featuring prayers and religious instruction and broadcast on two radio stations in San Jose every weekday morning. McDonnell and the other priests also emphasized the development of annual parish missions—week-long evangelical efforts that drew hundreds of Mexican families to their own territorial parishes for Masses with Spanish-language sermons, sacraments, rosaries, religious instruction, and social events. Most important, the priests responded to their own limitations by focusing on the development of Catholic community centers. Located in urban barrios that lacked a church and designated pastor, these centers would cultivate lay leadership and rely upon those leaders to offer a variety of Spanish-language services. Thus, the priests hoped, the centers would serve as beacons, guiding Mexican Catholics back to the institutional Church even without the daily presence of a priest.⁶⁸

Father McDonnell's work in San Jose during the 1950s revolved around the development of a Catholic community center that would serve the Eastside barrios. McDonnell had spent time in East San Jose in summer 1949, when he met with Leta Elizondo and other lay leaders, and he returned a year later as a member of the Spanish Mission Band. At the time, Santa Clara County remained mostly rural. With its orchards, farms, and pastures, the Santa Clara Valley was still known by many residents as the "Valley of Heart's Delight." But the county and its largest city were growing quickly during the decade after World War II. Between 1940 and 1955, San Jose's population grew from 68,000 to 150,000. The population of the county as a whole climbed from 175,000 to 400,000, including 50,000 ethnic Mexicans. Returning to San Jose in 1950, McDonnell was drawn back to the Mayfair district—the unincorporated residential area located several miles east of downtown, just beyond the city limits. The Mayfair district encompassed about 1.3 square miles of land bounded on the west by U.S. Highway 101, on the north by Alum Rock Road, and on the east and south by farmland and open pasture. Silver Creek ran through the district from the northwest to the southeast; it was a dry arroyo during the summer months but was flood prone during heavy rains. Some 3,000 ethnic Mexicans lived in Sal Si Puedes and five

⁶⁶ Donald McDonnell, "Report on 1950 Work," in McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 16, AASF; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 295-96. National Catholic Rural Life Council quoted in Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 295.

⁶⁷ Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 297.

⁶⁸ Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 49-50, 54-57, 79-83; Father Donald McDonnell to Most Rev. John J. Mitty, September 15, 1952, in McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, AASF; "Report to Rev. John J. Mitty," February 15, 1951, in McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF.

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other barrios in the Mayfair district. They were a small but relatively active portion of McDonnell's charge.⁶⁹

Wearing his Roman collar, McDonnell walked up and down the dirt roads of Sal Si Puedes and other Eastside barrios in fall 1950—knocking on doors, meeting families, and discussing their needs in fluent Spanish. He heard stories about economic hardship, malnutrition and poor health, neglect from government officials, and humiliating discrimination. But he also heard stories about mistreatment from within the Catholic Church, including a lack of Spanish-language services at St. Patrick's and a lack of hospitality from parishioners at Five Wounds and Holy Family. Some residents might have told McDonnell that they signed a petition earlier that summer requesting their own Mexican national parish in East San Jose. By then, McDonnell likely knew that Archbishop Mitty would not support a national parish. The goal of the Spanish Mission Band was to better integrate ethnic Mexicans into the institutional Church, and Mitty believed that a new national parish for ethnic Mexican Catholics would reinforce their segregation. The tension around this issue would continue to grow—leading eventually to the establishment of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel. In the meantime, McDonnell deferred the issue by securing Mitty's permission to open a Mass Station in the building known as Tremont Hall in January 1951 (allowing the regular celebration of Mass, even though the building was not consecrated). McDonnell then persuaded Mitty to designate the entire Mayfair district a mission area, keeping it under the jurisdiction of St. Patrick's Parish but allowing McDonnell to serve as the pastor in residence beginning in October 1951.⁷⁰

As his fellow priests in the Spanish Mission Band began to work with lay leaders to develop community centers in Union City, Hayward, Tracy, and Stockton, Father McDonnell became a central figure among ethnic Mexican Catholics in East San Jose. The relationships that all four priests started to cultivate with a growing, multigenerational, ethnic Mexican laity would require a significant amount of flexibility. At the same time, these relationships would be defined by a high degree of mutual respect. McDonnell knew, for example, that public processions and outdoor fiestas were an important part of Mexican Catholicism, especially for men who had learned to see the processions as public enactments of their own faith, identity, and solidarity. Catholic officials generally discouraged such events, but McDonnell would work with men in the Eastside barrios to stage traditional processions such as the *Vía Crucis*, turning an old telephone pole into a massive cross that the men carried together through the barrios to celebrate the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. McDonnell would exhibit a similar level of respectful cooperation with women, including lay leaders such as Leta Elizondo who had learned to assume responsibility for religious education and social services as well as the fiestas and other community events. His respect for Mexican American youth would be reflected in his support for social events that appealed to them, such as club meetings, dances, picnics, and sports.⁷¹

In cultivating relationships with ethnic Mexican men, women, and youth throughout the archdiocese, the members of the Spanish Mission Band were inspired by an emerging theological principle that viewed the Catholic Church in its entirety as the "Mystical Body of Christ." Based on the Pauline books of the New Testament and defined by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943), this principle affirmed a sense of equality among the Catholic faithful around the world. As Gina Pitti explains, "through membership in the Church and the sharing of the Eucharist, all disciples of Christ were [understood to be] equal, regardless of race, nationality or any other secular distinction." For the Spanish Mission Band and other

⁶⁹ Clark, *Health*, 9-10, 34-38.

⁷⁰ Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 167; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 53, 191-95, 253; McDonnell, interview; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 83, 143; Leo T. Maher to Rev. Donald McDonnell, January 6, 1951, in McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 16, AASF; "Report on Work in Santa Clara County Permanent Settlements – 1951," in McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF; Thomas J. Bowe to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, September 25, 1951, in McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF.

⁷¹ Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 192; Clark, *Health*, 104; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 115-19, 124, 144-51, 194.

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like-minded clergy, “the Mystical Body of Christ offered the ideal for community life and the basis for Catholic universalism.”⁷²

In the midst of World War II and in its aftermath, this papal emphasis on equality carried global resonance. Father McDonnell brought this emphasis with him to East San Jose. He believed ethnic Mexicans under his pastoral care deserved equal treatment within the Church and beyond, and he would do everything he could to secure that treatment. McDonnell himself would treat East San Jose’s ethnic Mexicans not only with respect but with great affection—and the feelings soon became mutual. “To say the people ‘like’ him is an understatement,” a parish historian later observed. “Fr. McDonnell gave himself to the people here. . . . He was completely at their service. . . . He loved his people and they knew it.” In the early 1950s, McDonnell would bring a sense of hope to the Mexican American community of East San Jose, at a time when the community’s prospects were bleak. But he would bring more than hope. Through his presence, his advocacy, and his actions throughout the coming decade, he would bring tangible evidence of the community’s empowerment. That particular gift would not be lost on Cesar Chavez, who returned to Sal Si Puedes just as Father McDonnell was becoming a familiar presence.⁷³

Father Donald McDonnell and Cesar Chavez, 1950-1952

The forces associated with agricultural production, migrant farm labor, and the marginalization of ethnic Mexicans in the American West helped bring Cesar Chavez to East San Jose several times, including a brief stay in Sal Si Puedes in fall 1950. After spending a year and a half in Crescent City, he returned to Sal Si Puedes in spring 1952 as an unemployed, 25-year-old husband and father of three young children. Likewise, the forces associated with the growth of the American Catholic Church, the mistreatment of Mexican Catholics, and the Church’s efforts to respond helped pull Donald McDonnell to East San Jose, first as a missionary priest in fall 1950 and then as a 28-year-old pastor in residence in fall 1951. Chavez and McDonnell met, and they began to form what might have seemed like an unlikely friendship. The bond they formed in the years to come would change not only the course of Chavez’s life but also the fight for Mexican American civil rights, the trajectory of the farmworker movement, and the relationship between Latinos and the American Catholic Church.

Fifteen years after they met, Chavez fondly recalled his first encounter with McDonnell. Chavez was at home in Sal Si Puedes late one evening in fall 1950, shortly after convincing his family to abandon the attempt at sharecropping strawberries in the foothills of East San Jose. McDonnell had just been appointed to the Spanish Mission Band and was undertaking one of his first informal censuses of San Jose’s Eastside barrios. The priest knocked on Chavez’s door, introduced himself in fluent Spanish, and asked to talk with Chavez about his family’s needs. McDonnell knew about the local residents’ petition requesting a Mexican national parish, and he wanted to gauge support for the development of a Catholic community center in the Mayfair district. Chavez was one of many residents who told McDonnell how his family felt unwelcome at Five Wounds Parish, but Chavez was more interested in talking with McDonnell about the material needs of farmworkers, including the need for a strong labor union. McDonnell’s receptiveness surprised him. As Chavez specifically remembered, McDonnell “sat with me past midnight telling me about social justice and the Church’s stand on farm labor and reading from the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII in which he upheld labor unions.”⁷⁴

Chavez was eager to hear more, but the promise of steady work in the lumber industry soon took him to

⁷² Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 94; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 196.

⁷³ Parish historian quoted in Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 216.

⁷⁴ Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 81; Eugene Nelson, *Huelga: The First Hundred Days of the Great Delano Grape Strike* (Delano, CA: Farm Worker Press, 1966), 37; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 143; Ferriss and Sandoval, *Fight in the Fields*, 46. Chavez quoted in Nelson, *Huelga*, 37.

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Crescent City. When he returned to Sal Si Puedes in spring 1952, his parents and younger siblings had come to know Father McDonnell better. They were “some of the first members that joined his congregation for Masses” in Tremont Hall, which Chavez later remembered as “a little Puerto Rican hall” that was nothing more than “a broken-down little shack.” Chavez wanted to learn more from McDonnell, so he started offering to help the priest with his ministerial work, beginning with some needed repairs at Tremont Hall. The dilapidated building—located about two blocks from Chavez’s parents’ house—was more than thirty years old, and parishioners would tell a story about the Christmas Mass when rain leaking through the roof fell directly onto the roof of the stable in the nativity scene below. “Father McDonnell was about my age,” Chavez explained to writer Jacques Levy. “We became great friends when I began to help him [at Tremont Hall], doing a little carpentry work, cleaning up the place, getting some chairs, and painting some of the old benches.”⁷⁵

Later in life, McDonnell did not recall that first encounter with Chavez in fall 1950, though it is likely he made more of an impression on Chavez than the younger farmworker made on him. McDonnell’s first memories of Chavez formed in summer 1952, when Chavez began to spend more time with him at Tremont Hall and elsewhere on his travels through the Santa Clara Valley. “I would do anything to get the Father to tell me more about labor history,” Chavez later noted. “I began going to the bracero camps with him to help with Mass, to the city jail with him to talk to prisoners, anything to be with him so that he could tell me more about the farm labor movement.” As Chavez began to emerge as a leader in the Mayfair district, for example, a girl who was orphaned by her mother’s death asked Chavez for financial assistance for the funeral, and Chavez turned to McDonnell. Rather than donate funds to pay a mortuary, the priest suggested they perform the burial themselves. Chavez owned a station wagon and offered to drive. He asked his brother to build a simple coffin, recruited a few more volunteers to prepare the body and help with the burial, and assisted McDonnell with the Mass. In the years to come, Chavez “began to spend more time with Father McDonnell,” accompanying him and assisting him as often as he could. “We had long talks about farm workers,” Chavez recalled. “I knew a lot about the work, but I didn’t know anything about the economics, and I learned quite a bit from him.”⁷⁶

Looking back on his own emergence as an advocate for civil rights, labor rights, and social justice, Chavez gave McDonnell a remarkable amount of credit: “My education started when I met Father Donald McDonnell, who came to Sal Si Puedes because there was no Catholic church there, no priest, and hundreds of Mexican Americans.” Chavez felt tremendous gratitude for a priest who treated him as his equal while mentoring him and exposing him to a universe of writings and ideas that defined (or complemented) modern Catholic social doctrine. As Chavez later explained, McDonnell was the first priest with whom he formed any sort of meaningful relationship. After the Chavez family left Arizona, “we became migratory workers, and so we never had a home, we never had a school, [and] . . . we never belonged with any priest or any one church.” Catholic faith was a source of strength for the family during the 1940s, but they were rarely in one place long enough to form relationships with clergy and the institutional Church. The fact that the priests Chavez encountered had not seemed interested in his family’s hardships did not help. McDonnell, however, “was the first priest that I met that was . . . interested in our lives as farmworkers and interested in doing something about the injustices [they had faced].” Thus he and McDonnell “developed a long and very warm friendship and . . . sort of a student-teacher relationship.” The teacher was somewhat eccentric. McDonnell had a brilliant mind that allowed him to master five languages, he had tremendous energy but often worked past the point of exhaustion, he had incredible patience but little sense of time, and he had an earnestness that often masked his sense of humor. But he was unwavering in his faith (his favorite saying, no matter the challenge, was “God will provide”), and he entered Chavez’s life just as the young husband and father was on the verge of resigning himself to a life of

⁷⁵ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 89; Don McDonnell to Fr. Anthony Soto, March 22, 1966, copy in parish scrapbook, OLGP.

⁷⁶ McDonnell, interview; Chavez Medina, interview; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 89-91. Chavez quoted in Nelson, *Huelga*, 37; and in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 91.

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poverty and frustration.⁷⁷

McDonnell and Chavez were drawn together, in part, by their belief in the value of labor unions—a belief both men had inherited from their fathers. Chavez’s father had joined the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) shortly after the family’s arrival in California in 1939; Chavez himself joined the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) ten years later. Chavez still lacked an understanding of what he called the “real guts” of labor unions in the early 1950s, but he had participated in the NFLU cotton strike that Ernesto Galarza organized in 1949, and despite its failure he believed farmworkers eventually would benefit from a strong union. McDonnell’s father was a union member, too, but McDonnell viewed unions more from an academic perspective until he crossed paths with Galarza in 1950. As the Spanish Mission Band priests were launching their work that summer, Galarza was organizing tomato workers near the city of Tracy, twenty miles southwest of Stockton. Tracy was part of Father McCullough’s territory, and McDonnell was with him in September when several thousand ethnic Mexican tomato workers went on strike. In the coming weeks, the two priests ministered to these workers, joined them on the picket lines, and came to know them better—the migrant families and undocumented immigrants (“wetbacks”) but also the braceros brought in to break the strike. McCullough and McDonnell gained firsthand knowledge of the injustices all of these workers faced. Along the way, they began to develop great admiration for Galarza. “We all fell in love with Ernie,” McCullough recalled. “The rest of us had been kind of fumbling around with the problem, and here was a man who really knew what he was doing! . . . We thought, ‘Here’s the leader we’ve all been waiting for!’” When Galarza shifted his focus from organizing farmworkers to documenting the abuses tied to the Bracero Program, he did so with support from McCullough and McDonnell.⁷⁸

Father McDonnell’s experiences in Tracy strengthened his belief that farmworkers needed a strong labor union, and he shared this belief with Chavez when they met in fall 1950. By the time Chavez returned to Sal Si Puedes a year and a half later, McDonnell had developed an even better understanding of the injustices of the Bracero Program and the complexities of the nation’s agricultural labor system as a whole. He also knew how to simplify the issues. As Chavez recalled, McDonnell often stated that if growers followed the Church’s teachings, “there wouldn’t be any need for unions. But things being as they are . . . and being that the farmworkers are weak,” McDonnell would continue, “the only thing that is going to bring about justice . . . for them is by gaining some kind of strength. And the only example that we have [for how to do that] are unions, and so therefore unions are good, and there should be unions.” McDonnell carried four photographs to illustrate this explanation: photos of a grower’s mansion and a farmworker’s shack, plus photos of a high-rent San Francisco apartment building and a squalid labor camp, both owned by the same wealthy grower. Chavez understood the injustice inherent in this disparity, but McDonnell was the first priest to teach him that Catholics had the right and the duty to fight against it. Labor unions offered a means of doing so.⁷⁹

McDonnell soon gave Chavez copies of the papal encyclicals that had shaped his own views when he was in the seminary, beginning with Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Leo XIII issued this encyclical as a response to the growing divide between the wealthy and the working poor in industrializing nations. For centuries, the Church had taught Catholics to cultivate a sense of separation from the secular world, but *Rerum Novarum* called upon Catholics to engage modern society and grapple with its ills. Thus Leo XIII acknowledged the intensification of conflict between the wealthy (“a small number of very rich men”) and the workers (“the teeming masses of the laboring poor”), but then he insisted that socialist uprisings and the seizure

⁷⁷ Gallegos, interview, 2012; Duggan, “My Mind,” 24-26. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 89; and in Cesar Chavez, interview by Patrick McNamara, Delano, California, March 26, 1967, transcript in author’s possession.

⁷⁸ London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 84, 118; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 78-80; Duggan, “My Mind,” 28; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 217. McCullough quoted in London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 118.

⁷⁹ Chavez, interview by McNamara; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 91; Pawel, *Crusades*, 55; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 59-60.

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of private property were not the answer. Rather, social justice would be realized when all segments of society recognized and fulfilled their obligations to each other. The rich must donate unnecessary personal wealth to charitable causes, employers must pay wages that would enable workers to support families but also build up savings, public officials must develop laws to govern working conditions and provide more broadly for “the welfare and the comfort” of working-class communities, and workers themselves must form unions that would protect their interests but also encourage piety, nonviolence, hard work, and respectful treatment of employers and their property. McDonnell distilled the larger lesson for Chavez: “We are all one family and we must respect one another and honor one another and help one another.”⁸⁰

Chavez absorbed this and other lessons. “We did a lot of reading,” he remembered, and it continued with Pope Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Like *Rerum Novarum*, Pius XI’s encyclical denounced socialism, but *Quadragesimo Anno* went even further in critiquing capitalism’s elevation of individual attainment over the collective good. More important, these two encyclicals (as well as Pope Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis Christi*) emphasized human dignity and equality. As historian Mario García notes, the encyclicals proclaimed “that all humans are equal in the eyes of God and that despite social and class differences . . . all men and women must be treated with dignity and justice.” McDonnell then gave Chavez a biography of St. Francis of Assisi, “a gentle and humble man” who, Chavez learned, exhibited great respect for the Islamic faith while traveling in Egypt during the thirteenth century. A passing reference to Gandhi led Chavez to Louis Fischer’s work, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1950), sparking a lifelong interest in Gandhi’s leadership, self-discipline, and philosophy of nonviolence—all of which reflected Gandhi’s Hindu beliefs but also meshed with Chavez’s Catholicism. McDonnell next gave Chavez several books on the history of agricultural production in the American West. It is likely that at least one was written by Carey McWilliams, perhaps the book that examined “the Associated Farmers, their terror and strikebreaking tactics, and their financing by banks, utilities, and big corporations.” And, of course, Chavez continued to read the Bible. “I have read what Christ said when he was here,” Chavez later commented. “He was very clear in what he meant and knew exactly what he was after. He was extremely radical, and he was for social change.” These and other readings ranged widely, but all of them fueled discussions between McDonnell and Chavez about how to “solve the injustice” that farmworkers faced.⁸¹

The bond that McDonnell and Chavez began to form in 1952 would have a profound influence on Chavez and his life’s work. Chavez had observed injustice before meeting McDonnell, but he lacked an intellectual framework that would guide his response to it—a framework he would have developed in high school or even college had his formal education continued past the eighth grade. Yet as playwright and film director Luis Valdez has observed, Chavez’s relationship with Father McDonnell “became [his] high school, became college, became his orientation in the world.” McDonnell would downplay his own influence, later insisting that Chavez “was his own man,” but McDonnell taught Chavez—through readings, discussions, and the example of his own missionary work—that the Catholic faith was an activist faith. It called upon its adherents to serve and sacrifice and fight for social justice. And, at its best, it empowered them to do so. Chavez later told an interviewer that his Catholicism moved him to “go out and do things. That’s what I think is a real faith,” he explained, “and that’s what I think Christ really taught us: to go do something . . . clothe the naked, feed the hungry . . . give water to the thirsty. It’s very simple stuff and that’s what we’ve got to do.” In the few years before he came to know McDonnell, Chavez was on the verge of despair. While others in his position might have abandoned their faith and succumbed to hopelessness, McDonnell’s influence turned him around: “I went the other way. I drew closer to the Church the more I learned and understood.” This sense of connection to the Catholic Church, to

⁸⁰ McDonnell, interview; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 60-62; García, *Católicos*, 59-63; Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113rerum.htm> (accessed May 30, 2016).

⁸¹ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 91-93; García, *Católicos*, 59-63; Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11QUADR.HTM> (accessed May 30, 2016). Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 27, 91.

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Father McDonnell, and to his fellow men and women would stay with Chavez for the rest of his life.⁸²

It is important to recognize that Chavez's sense of connection developed within a specific historical context. Ethnic Mexicans were marginalized in East San Jose during the first half of the twentieth century, as they were throughout the American West. The mistreatment of Mexican Catholics within the institutional Church exacerbated the conditions they faced. In the aftermath of World War II, lay leaders in the barrios of the Mayfair district called for better treatment, and the Archdiocese of San Francisco began to respond by creating the Spanish Mission Band. Yet even as Chavez and other ethnic Mexican Catholics in East San Jose embraced Father McDonnell's presence, they continued to press for "a church of their own." Their efforts would produce Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel—a building that would nurture Chavez's own sense of connection but also serve as a fulcrum for the activism that would define this entire community.

FRED ROSS, THE CSO, AND THE MEXICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Many civil rights organizations—and countless activists—drove the Mexican American civil rights movement during the decades before and after World War II. LULAC was the most prominent organization, but others were important, too, including those that secured a major legal victory in the fight against school desegregation in 1947. During the 1950s, the Community Service Organization (CSO) would become the ascendant civil rights organization for ethnic Mexicans. The Cold War context and the support of the Catholic Church were factors in this growth, but Ross's role was crucial. Arriving in East San Jose in 1952, Ross would work with Father Donald McDonnell, Cesar Chavez, and Mexican American leaders to organize a chapter of the CSO and expand their fight for civil rights and social justice. Ross began to train Chavez in this work and thus changed the course of his life.

The Foundations and Emergence of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement Before the 1950s

A regional Mexican American civil rights movement did not exist before the 1940s, but foundational efforts emerged in local areas during the 1920s and 1930s, most notably in Texas and Southern California. Their aims and strategies varied, but these early efforts reflected ethnic Mexicans' responses to their economic and social marginalization in the U.S. The outbreak of World War II and the heightened importance of hemispheric relations fueled broader civil rights advocacy efforts during the 1940s and early 1950s. The emerging Cold War and a new surge in Mexican immigration did so as well, creating a context in which disjointed efforts could coalesce into a regional movement that would influence politics and policy at the national level. The Cold War also created a context in which the civil rights organizations that were the least tolerant of Communists—and the most committed to turning Mexican immigrants into U.S. citizens—would thrive.⁸³

By the 1920s, ethnic Mexicans throughout the American West had faced decades of hardship and discrimination. In rural areas, ethnic Mexican laborers confronted difficult working and living conditions and routinely faced mistreatment in and beyond the ranches, railroads, mines, fields, and packing houses. In San Antonio, Los Angeles, and other growing cities, ethnic Mexicans had to contend with economic hardship as

⁸² Valdez, interview; McDonnell, interview; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 60; Anne Klejment, "Dorothy Day and César Chávez: American Catholic Lives in Nonviolence," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 29, no. 3 (2011): 68-69; García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 8-9. Chavez quoted in García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 32; and Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 27.

⁸³ Cynthia E. Orozco, *No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 183-95, argues that the Mexican American civil rights movement began in the early 1920s, but her focus is limited to the emergence of LULAC in South Texas during the 1920s. LULAC itself would not become a meaningful presence in California until the 1940s, and even then it remained but one of several Mexican American civil rights organizations in the region.

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well as residential segregation, inferior schools, and municipal neglect. As a population, ethnic Mexicans were internally differentiated by place of birth, citizenship status, gender, class status, and other characteristics—but none of these differences mattered to white Americans who simply racialized them as “Mexicans” and treated them as inferior. A civil rights advocate in Texas thus recalled that during the 1910s and 1920s, “all along the highways you would see restaurants dotted with signs, ‘No Mexicans Allowed,’ and we couldn’t go into restaurants, swimming pools, and theaters. We had to go to places . . . in ‘little Mexico,’ little towns separate and apart from the cities.” A longtime resident of San Jose recalled a clear distinction between “us white people” and “those Mexicans,” and this distinction had economic consequences: “for one thing, they had the unskilled jobs, being the hod carriers and not the bricklayers, the carpenters’ helpers but not the carpenters, never the road contractors but the team drivers who delivered road gravel and spread it.” Racialization, segregation, and economic marginalization made it difficult for ethnic Mexicans to achieve social mobility or secure political power.⁸⁴

Organized responses to segregation and other civil rights abuses before the 1920s were sporadic and short-lived. For example, roughly four hundred ethnic Mexicans convened in Laredo, Texas, in 1911 to discuss a number of pressing issues, including discrimination in employment and education, political impotence, and several recent lynchings—yet the meeting, *El Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, failed to produce an organization that could sustain a response. Although the limitations of communication impeded early organizing work in places such as South Texas, additional factors were at play. For newly arriving immigrants during the 1910s and 1920s, political activism generally meant investment in the politics of Revolutionary-era Mexico. Even Mexican immigrants who had lived in the U.S. for a decade or more often remained oriented toward Mexico and, in growing colonias and barrios, toward each other. Most immigrants thus preferred to retain their Mexican citizenship rather than pursue U.S. citizenship. “I don’t want to be a [U.S.] citizen,” a resident of California acknowledged. “I’ll tell you why. [Mexicans] feel that Americans don’t trust them and treat them equal. . . . When I go to a show they don’t ask if I’m a citizen or not, but if I’m dark they put me on one side. . . . The same with work. . . . That’s why we don’t want to be citizens.” For most Mexican immigrants, U.S. citizenship seemed meaningless at best, but perhaps even a shameful acceptance of hypocrisy. Astute observers realized as much. As a Los Angeles priest stated in the 1920s, as long as Americans “treated Mexicans as an inferior race, undervalued their work, paid low wages, and mistreated them in general, Mexicans will show little interest in becoming U.S. citizens.” A widespread reluctance to embrace U.S. citizenship—and internal disagreements over how to respond to this reluctance—impeded early civil rights organizing efforts.⁸⁵

Even as citizenship remained a divisive issue, ethnic Mexicans began to form civil rights organizations during the 1920s and 1930s. Their efforts were rooted in the work of mutualistas and labor unions. In fact, one of the first organizations to engage in civil rights advocacy was the largest mutual aid society in the Southwest, the *Alianza Hispano-Americana*, founded in Tucson, Arizona, in 1894. Like hundreds of other mutualistas, the *Alianza* emphasized ethnic Mexican solidarity and provided member benefits such as life insurance. The *Alianza* did not differentiate between citizens and non-citizens nor did it engage in political activism, but as the organization grew during the 1900s and 1910s—chartering scores of lodges throughout Arizona and then into Southern California, New Mexico, and Texas—it provided legal assistance to members fighting discrimination and eventually began to initiate its own civil rights litigation. Ethnic Mexican labor unions likewise cultivated solidarity between citizens and non-citizens. Labor unions were more likely than mutualistas to engage in civil rights advocacy, as when the *Confederación de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas* (founded in Los Angeles in 1928) challenged discrimination in hiring and compensation, but unions focused primarily on improving wages and

⁸⁴ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 86-90. Advocate quoted in Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 30. Resident quoted in Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 87.

⁸⁵ Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 66-72; Griswold del Castillo and de León, *North to Aztlán*, 72. Resident quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 89. Priest quoted in Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 153-54.

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working conditions. Still, the work of organizing unions and maintaining their strength provided invaluable experience for those who would begin to organize or join civil rights organizations. As historian David Gutiérrez concludes, “labor-organizing efforts . . . laid the groundwork for the gradual emergence of new forms of political . . . organization in the years before World War II.”⁸⁶

The first ethnic Mexican civil rights organization to achieve a degree of longevity was the Order Sons of America (OSA), founded in San Antonio in 1921. Roughly forty men launched the OSA, and within a month they had attracted more than one hundred additional members. Although their occupations varied, most of these men combined working-class sympathies with middle-class aspirations; they were business owners, skilled workers, and professionals but also foremen, farmers, and ranchers. All members were U.S. citizens—some with roots pre-dating the Texas Revolution and others who had immigrated and naturalized—and many had served in World War I. After some debate they made the decision to exclude non-citizens. They did not specifically exclude women, but they did not recruit women, either. The OSA’s purpose was to encourage “the intellectual, musical, educational and physical development of its members.” To do so, members would embrace the rights and the responsibilities of U.S. citizenship and, unlike most mutualistas and labor unions, their organization would engage in “political action.” As historian Cynthia Orozco notes, the OSA blended elements of a mutualista, a labor union, a civic group, and a political association.⁸⁷

The OSA expanded beyond San Antonio into other South Texas cities and towns, carrying an agenda that targeted discrimination and segregation, especially in schools, swimming pools, and restaurants. For various reasons, some members defected from the OSA and formed their own organizations, including the Order Sons of Texas, the Order Knights of America, and the League of Latin American Citizens. By the late 1920s, however, new leaders of these organizations had decided to seek a merger. After key differences were resolved—resulting, for example, in agreements to exclude non-citizens, to de-emphasize support for the working class, and to admit women only as nonvoting members—representatives formalized a merger in 1929, thereby launching the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). As this new organization grew during the 1930s from twenty councils in Texas to more than eighty councils throughout the Southwest, its differentiation between citizens and non-citizens remained its most defining and, in retrospect, most controversial characteristic. As many historians have noted, LULAC embodied the assimilationist aspirations of middle-class Mexican American men. LULAC’s founders wanted to “develop within the members of our race, the best, purest, and [most] perfect type of true and loyal citizen of the United States.” But these men believed this process would begin and end with those who already were citizens. Given that ethnic Mexicans faced discrimination regardless of their citizenship status, detractors argued that an organization dedicated to defending only the rights of Mexican Americans would never be as strong as an organization that defended the rights—and protected the dignity—of Mexican nationals as well. Yet LULAC’s founding members insisted they could maximize their political power only by demonstrating a clear-cut commitment to U.S. citizenship.⁸⁸

LULAC’s original vision gained less traction in California, where early civil rights organizing efforts not only bridged generations but also reflected the involvement of non-citizens and women. The first LULAC council in California was formed in Sacramento in 1933 by a transplant from San Antonio. The second council was

⁸⁶ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 96-103, 107; Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 67-68; Griswold del Castillo and de León, *North to Aztlán*, 73-74.

⁸⁷ Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 73-77; Craig A. Kaplowitz, *LULAC: Mexican Americans and National Policy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 20. OSA charter quoted in Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 74.

⁸⁸ Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 73-91, 165-76; Kaplowitz, *LULAC*, 21-23, 34; Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 90; Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-33. LULAC constitution quoted in Kaplowitz, *LULAC*, 21.

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created in Los Angeles four years later but soon went dormant, and LULAC remained a weak presence in the state until the 1940s. Meanwhile, new organizations began to emerge. The Mexican American Movement (MAM), for example, was founded in Los Angeles in 1934 as an offshoot of the Young Men's Christian Association. MAM encouraged its young members to finish high school, attend college, and serve their communities. As the oldest members established themselves as leaders, they challenged school segregation and other civil rights abuses. An effort known as El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Español represented an even broader undertaking. Organized primarily by a Guatemalan-born labor leader, Luisa Moreno, El Congreso convened for the first time in Los Angeles in 1939. Most of the nearly 1,000 participants were from Los Angeles, but the presence of Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals from across the Southwest, representatives from Puerto Rican and Cuban organizations on the East Coast, representatives from labor unions, and several hundred women—including Josefina Fierro de Bright and others in leadership positions—was a testament to El Congreso's inclusive approach. Participants in El Congreso continued to meet regularly after 1939, but concerns about a wartime backlash against "disunity" soon suppressed the organization's activism. Still, El Congreso's calls for ethnic solidarity, workers' rights, and an end to gender discrimination would leave an important legacy for postwar organizing efforts.⁸⁹

U.S. entry into World War II did bring pressure for unity on the homefront, but because the war also magnified the importance of hemispheric relations, it provided new leverage for civil rights advocacy. Thus LULAC's president, George Sánchez, appealed to the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, Nelson Rockefeller, seeking better treatment for Mexican Americans. "They are citizens," Sánchez stressed, yet the federal government failed to protect their civil rights. This failure "affects not only our internal situation," he warned, but also "our relations with the Mexican Republic." At the same time, the creation of the Bracero Program in 1942 brought a new influx of Mexican immigrants and reignited troublesome debates among civil rights organizers about how to respond to immigration and the broader issue of citizenship. The 1940 Census had counted 380,000 Mexican nationals in the U.S. population and 700,000 Mexican Americans. While 85 percent of the Mexican nationals had made no effort to naturalize, wartime ideals and military service spurred younger Mexican Americans to embrace U.S. citizenship. Some 350,000 Mexican Americans served in the U.S. military during the war, and countless more supported soldiers and sailors, purchased war bonds, and made other sacrifices on the homefront, all in the spirit of citizenship. For them, wartime injustices such as the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots underlined the ongoing need for civil rights advocacy but also suggested the larger value of a postwar push to turn immigrants into citizens and citizens into voters.⁹⁰

The context of the war—and specific wartime injustices—spurred Mexican American civil rights advocates in Southern California to establish and support organizations such as the Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth (CCLAY) and the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee (SLDC). The former, founded in Los Angeles 1941 by attorney Manuel Ruiz, pushed for youth centers, recreational programs, and school desegregation. The latter, founded in 1942 by Luisa Moreno, Josefina Fierro de Bright, Eduardo Quevedo, Bert Corona, and other organizers, focused more broadly on the anti-Mexican sentiment that drove the persecution of younger Mexican Americans. In Southern California as in Texas and elsewhere, the war magnified the importance of unity between the U.S. and Mexico. For civil rights advocates in Southern California, the Zoot Suit Riots and other wartime injustices that reflected anti-Mexican hostility pointed just as clearly to the need for solidarity between ethnic Mexicans who were U.S. citizens and those who were not. Thus when CCLAY denounced discrimination in the hiring of ethnic Mexicans, it warned that "the unity of the [Allies] . . . and [the success of] the

⁸⁹ Margie de la Torre Aguirre, *LULAC Project: Patriots with Civil Rights* (Yorba Linda, CA: Abrazo Productions, 2009), 55-56; George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 244-69; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 110-11; García, *Mexican Americans*, 145-74.

⁹⁰ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 122; Griswold del Castillo and De León, *North to Aztlán*, 102. Sánchez quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 132.

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government's program of Pan-American solidarity are endangered by discriminatory treatment of [Mexican] nationals." Similarly, the SLDC noted that "it wasn't only seventeen boys who were on trial. It was the whole of the Mexican people. . . . It was the whole of Latin America. . . . It was the Good Neighbor Policy. It was the [Allies] . . . and all for which they fought."⁹¹

Just as El Congreso had grown quieter when the U.S. entered World War II, these newer organizations lost much of their leverage once the war ended. In the wake of the war, however, Mexican American veterans emerged as new champions of civil rights. "We have proved ourselves true and loyal Americans," one veteran wrote in 1945. "[N]ow give us social, political, and economic equality. . . . We ask for it not as a favor, but as a delegated right guaranteed by our Constitution, and as a reward for faithful service." Many of these veterans were drawn to LULAC, and the organization's membership numbers soon began to recover from a wartime decline. Many veterans also were drawn to another organization founded in Texas, the American G.I. Forum. A physician in Corpus Christi, Hector P. García, launched this organization in 1948 specifically to fight discrimination that Mexican Americans confronted within the Veterans Administration. The Forum's influence increased dramatically when it took up the cause of Félix Longoria, a soldier killed in the Philippines in 1945. Longoria's remains were returned to his widow in 1949, but the director of the funeral parlor in Three Rivers, Texas, refused to hold a wake because the family was "Mexican." With support from Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, García arranged to have Longoria's remains interred at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. By the early 1950s, the G.I. Forum was one of the best known civil rights organizations in the Southwest, even though its focus on veterans and intentional disregard for the welfare of Mexican nationals, especially recent immigrants, limited its reach.⁹²

Like the members of LULAC, members of the G.I. Forum believed that ethnic Mexicans must "earn" their civil rights protections. They would do so by embracing U.S. citizenship but also assimilating into American culture and demonstrating their patriotism—by becoming less "Mexican" and more "American." Another new civil rights organization, the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA), combined a more inclusive approach with a more militant stance. ANMA was founded in Phoenix in 1949 by ethnic Mexican members of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers. A leftist union, Mine Mill dated back to the 1890s. It was reborn in the 1910s and revived again during the 1930s, becoming a founding member of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). By the 1940s, the union's membership included sugar beet workers in Colorado, mine workers in New Mexico, cotton workers in Arizona and Texas, and factory workers in Southern California. Although many of the union's leaders already were members of the Communist Party, they sought a separate organization through which ethnic Mexican laborers could advocate for their own interests, including a cultural identity that did not reject their Mexican heritage. "The time has come," founding members declared, "when the Mexican people *must* . . . form a strong, militant national organization to which the individual can look for protection." ANMA would be "a national association for the protection of the civil, economic, and political rights of the Mexican people in the United States as well as the expansion of their education, culture, and progress." Inheriting the legacy of El Congreso, ANMA allowed anyone to join, regardless of nationality, citizenship status, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, or political affiliation. Mine Mill faced expulsion from the CIO in 1950 because of connections to the Communist Party, but ANMA continued to grow, soon reaching thirty-five chapters and several thousand members across the Southwest.⁹³

⁹¹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 126-30; Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 249; García, "Americans All," 279-88; Mario T. García, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 114-15. Council quoted in Mario T. García, "Americans All: The Mexican American Generation and the Politics of Wartime Los Angeles, 1941-1945," *Social Science Quarterly* 65 (1984): 284. Defense Committee quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 128.

⁹² Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 42-43; Kaplowitz, *LULAC*, 39; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 154-55. Veteran quoted in Márquez, *LULAC*, 42.

⁹³ García, *Mexican Americans*, 199-208; García, *Memories*, 169-76; Ernesto Chávez, "*¡Mi Raza Primero!*": *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 14-18.

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The rapid growth of regional organizations such as ANMA and the G.I. Forum during the early 1950s reflected the full emergence of a Mexican American civil rights movement during the 1940s. The grassroots activism of local organizations did so as well. The movement's first major legal victory, in fact, sprang from the work of one of these local organizations, the Latin American Voters League (LAVL) of Orange County, California. Fewer than a dozen men founded the LAVL in Santa Ana in 1943, but they had strong ties to ethnic Mexican business owners, professionals, and laborers in colonias and barrios across the county. The driving force behind the organization was an insurance salesman, Hector Tarango. He had no children, but several members were fathers. Thus one of their first campaigns targeted policies that required their children to attend segregated "Mexican schools." After more than a year of organizing in the colonias and barrios and meeting with various officials in their separate school districts, the members of the LAVL hired an attorney, David Marcus, and in 1945 they filed a federal class action lawsuit, *Méndez et al. v. Westminster School District of Orange County et al.* The lawsuit named four defendant school districts and five plaintiff families, but the lawsuit represented some five thousand children who faced discrimination and segregation throughout Orange County. In 1946 U.S. District Court Judge Paul McCormick ruled that the segregation of schools based on ethnic difference was unconstitutional and actually fostered social inequality—a ruling that prompted the repeal of school segregation laws in California under Governor Earl Warren and ultimately helped pave the way for two landmark decisions of the Warren Court, *Hernández v. Texas* (1954) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).⁹⁴

Writing in 1947, Carey McWilliams heralded the *Méndez et al.* case as a sign that "the Mexican minority throughout the Southwest has begun to attain real social and political maturity." McCormick's ruling alone, however, was not enough to compel all Southern California school districts to desegregate. Civil rights activists had to maintain pressure on local officials, before and even after the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld McCormick's decision in 1947. Activists in Orange County received support from LULAC, prompting the LAVL to reconstitute itself as a LULAC council in 1946. They also received help from Fred Ross, a 36-year-old community organizer working for the American Council on Race Relations. Ross had started his work in Southern California in early 1946, and he spent two months that summer with Hector Tarango and other activists in and around Santa Ana. Ross was just beginning to develop the organizing strategies and the emphasis on political empowerment he would share with Cesar Chavez in the years to come.⁹⁵

While in Orange County, Ross learned that opponents would undercut his efforts by labeling him a Communist. Indeed, the growth of anti-Communism and the emerging Cold War were creating a context in which anyone who advocated for social change was subject to "red-baiting." The Cold War—specifically the need to mobilize troops after the start of the Korean War—also offered growers and government officials a rationale for extending the Bracero Program indefinitely. Congress passed Public Law 78 in 1951, and the numbers of braceros and undocumented Mexican immigrants began to skyrocket. By this point, the Mexican American civil rights movement had coalesced around key issues: discrimination, segregation, educational opportunities, economic advancement, and political empowerment. The issue of immigration had diminished in importance during the 1930s and 1940s, but the permanent renewal of the Bracero Program restored the issue's centrality.

Founding member statement quoted in García, *Mexican Americans*, 200.

⁹⁴ Scholarship on the *Mendez et al.* case is extensive, but most of it gives excessive credit to Gonzalo Méndez and insufficient credit to Hector Tarango and the LAVL. See for example Philippa Strum, *Mendez v. Westminster: School Desegregation and Mexican-American Rights* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010); and Brilliant, *Color of America*, 61-64; but also David-James Gonzales, "Hector Tarango, the Politicization of the Mexican American Generation in Southern California, and the Role of the Unheralded in Chicano History" (B.A. thesis, UC San Diego, 2011); Aguirre, *LULAC Project*; and Raymond W. Rast, curator, *A Class Action: The Grassroots Struggle for School Desegregation in California*, exhibition at Old Courthouse Museum, Santa Ana, CA, 2011.

⁹⁵ Carey McWilliams, "Is Your Name Gonzales?," *The Nation* (March 15, 1947): 304; Aguirre, *LULAC Project*, 28-30 and passim; Gonzales, "Hector Tarango," 55-67.

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Many Mexican Americans feared that a new wave of Mexican immigrants would threaten them economically and, by stoking anti-Mexican sentiment, weaken them politically. As historian David Gutiérrez notes, the leaders of LULAC and the G.I. Forum in particular “considered the Mexican immigration question to be the most important political and social issue facing Mexican Americans” during the 1950s.⁹⁶

After leaving Orange County, Ross would work with Mexican American civil rights activists in Los Angeles to launch the Community Service Organization. This new civil rights organization would navigate the evolving Cold War context by distancing itself from Communism but also by treating Mexican immigrants not as threats but as allies—and as fellow humans who deserved to be treated with dignity and justice.

Fred Ross and the Community Service Organization

The Cold War fueled anti-Communism and Mexican immigration, thus creating a new context for civil rights organizing among ethnic Mexicans. Fred Ross’s understanding of this context helped him steer the Community Service Organization (CSO) forward. Civil rights organizations such as LULAC and ANMA remained significant, but the CSO was the ascendant organization for ethnic Mexicans during the 1950s because it combined an opposition to Communism with an embrace of immigrants—and because it aligned itself with the Catholic Church, an institution that likewise combined a staunch anti-Communism with an insistence that all people are equal, regardless of differences such as race, ethnicity, or nationality. Thus, as historian Stephen Pitti has noted, the CSO soon would become “the most important civil rights organization of its kind in the West.” Ross’s dedication to this organization earned him a place of high esteem, especially among CSO members such as Congressman Edward Roybal, National Council of La Raza co-founder Herman Gallegos, UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta, California Supreme Court Justice Cruz Reynoso, and, of course, Cesar Chavez.⁹⁷

Ross was born in San Francisco in 1910, the son of middle-class Methodist parents. He grew up in Los Angeles, attended the University of Southern California, and considered a career in education. Graduating during the Great Depression, Ross was drawn instead to social work and landed a position with the Farm Security Administration. By 1939 he was managing the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp near Bakersfield—the “Weedpatch Camp” that John Steinbeck depicted favorably in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Ross met thousands of “Okies” and other migrant workers from diverse backgrounds, but unlike other camp managers, he did not segregate their housing, and he encouraged self-governance through the formation of camp councils. He crossed paths with conservative growers and radical labor organizers, hosted visits from Eleanor Roosevelt and Woody Guthrie, and eventually earned a promotion to the position of Assistant Director of Community Services, with responsibilities for seventeen camps in California and Arizona. Married in 1942, Ross moved to Ohio and worked for the War Relocation Authority, the federal agency responsible for managing “internment camps” for Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans. Recognizing the injustice of wartime confinement, Ross focused his energies on helping individuals and families leave the camps and resettle in the Midwest.⁹⁸

After the war, Ross returned to California and took a position with the American Council on Race Relations (ACRR). Founded in Chicago in 1944, the ACRR commissioned studies on race relations, offered training and mediation services, and advocated for civil rights protections across the country. Ross’s first assignment was in Fontana, home to Kaiser Steel and a booming working-class population, fifty miles east of Los Angeles. In December 1945 Ku Klux Klan members in Fontana had burned the home of O’Day Short, an African American man who asserted his right to live in a white neighborhood. The fire killed Short’s wife and children; he died in

⁹⁶ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 154.

⁹⁷ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 149. Chavez, Huerta, Roybal, and Reynoso have received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

⁹⁸ Thompson, *America’s Social Arsonist*, 10-61; P. David Finks, *The Radical Vision of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 37-38; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 86.

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the hospital a month later. By February 1946 Ross had arrived in Fontana, and he quickly made connections with local civil rights activists, including African Americans, Jews, and liberal white Protestants. Aware of the Klan's hostility toward Catholics—and struck by the absence of Mexican Americans at local meetings convened to discuss race relations—Ross reached out to Ruth Tuck, a sociologist at the University of Redlands who had contacts with Mexican families in the area. Tuck introduced Ross to Ignacio López, who was close to him in age but already a seasoned civil rights activist. Together Tuck and López stoked Ross's interest in building an organization. Ross recalled with a touch of humor, "I spent the whole night at Ruth's house while they pumped propaganda in my ear," encouraging him "to start organizing Mexican Americans."⁹⁹

Ignacio López was Fred Ross's first close ally—and, in many ways, his mentor—in the effort to organize Mexican Americans. López was born in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1908, but he grew up in El Paso and then Pomona, graduating from Pomona College in 1931. Two years later he launched *El Espectador*, a weekly Spanish-language newspaper that covered local and regional news but also offered investigative reports and editorials on civil rights abuses. Increasingly, López used his newspaper as a platform to challenge those abuses. In the late 1930s, for example, he began to call for boycotts of theaters and other businesses that segregated or otherwise discriminated against ethnic Mexicans. When one of the first boycotts succeeded, he focused on the lesson learned: the economic boycott was "the only way, a quiet way, without insults or violence," that ethnic Mexicans had successfully challenged "those who abuse people of our race." After another boycott, López praised "the Mexican community" for taking the first steps in the "defense of its dignity and in its struggle for civil rights." López also put himself on the front lines. In 1943 López and other activists decided to wage a legal battle against segregation in San Bernardino's public parks and swimming pools. They hired David Marcus—the attorney who would argue the *Méndez et al.* case two years later—and Marcus filed their class action lawsuit, *López et al. v. Seccombe et al.* Their victory came in 1944, when for the first time a federal judge ruled that segregation based on ethnic difference violated the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.¹⁰⁰

In February 1946, shortly after he met Ross, López led their effort to create the Pomona Unity League, an organization that welcomed veterans and other ethnic Mexican men and women from a variety of backgrounds. That same month, defiant officials in nearby Orange County had announced they would appeal Judge McCormick's ruling in the *Méndez et al.* case. By then López and other civil rights activists across the Southwest knew they could make appeals to public officials, sustain economic boycotts, and wage legal battles—as they had done for two decades—but López also realized their struggles would not end until they possessed the political power to hold public officials accountable but also elect public officials from their own ranks. Thus from the outset, the Pomona Unity League focused on political empowerment through citizenship, voter registration, political campaigns, and elections. As López often reminded his readers, "the vote is our most sacred right and . . . [our] most powerful political weapon." Ross agreed, and in the coming months the two men organized Unity Leagues in Chino, Ontario, San Bernardino, Redlands, and two in Riverside, both of which included ethnic Mexicans and African Americans in the kind of coalition Ross had hoped to see in Fontana. Members of these Unity Leagues soon registered more than one thousand new voters and, in Chino and Ontario, they campaigned on behalf of Mexican American candidates for city council. The candidate in Chino, Andrés Morales, won a stunning victory in April 1946, becoming the first ethnic Mexican elected to a city council in

⁹⁹ Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 61-65; Myra Tanner Weiss, *Vigilante Terror in Fontana: The Tragic Story of O'Day Short and His Family* (Los Angeles: Socialist Workers Party, 1946); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), 399-401; García, *World of Its Own*, 234; Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, 144.

¹⁰⁰ García, *Memories*, 168; García, *World of Its Own*, 228-35, 300n49; Mark Ocegueda, "Lopez v. Seccombe: The City of San Bernardino's Mexican American Defense Committee and Its Role in Regional and National Desegregation," *History in the Making: California State University, San Bernardino, Journal of History* 3 (2010): 1-31. López quoted in García, *Mexican Americans*, 87.

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California in the twentieth century.¹⁰¹

By late summer 1946 Ross was planning to organize the next Unity League in San Diego, but given the resistance to school desegregation efforts in Orange County, he decided to focus first on Santa Ana. Ignacio López connected Ross with Hector Tarango and other activists in and around Santa Ana—the men who had filed the *Méndez et al.* lawsuit in 1945 and joined LULAC earlier in 1946. Although some of these men were threatened by Ross's plans to cultivate working-class leadership and build multiracial coalitions, Tarango gave Ross his full support. Together they organized two new Unity Leagues in Santa Ana and helped members prioritize their demands on local officials. Then in September, when the El Modena School District (one of the defendants in the *Méndez et al.* case) decided to ignore McCormick's ruling, Ross and Tarango organized a third Unity League in El Modena. They helped members press for desegregation, retain legal counsel, and ultimately file a charge of contempt. As they raced to register hundreds of voters in advance of the November elections, the El Modena School District finally agreed to desegregate. Just as Ross was moving on to San Diego, his opponents pounced. Shortly after the elections, the local district attorney called Tarango and the other LULAC leaders to a meeting with the county sheriff and a member of a powerful growers' organization. The grower warned them that Ross was a Communist who had nearly instigated a riot among African Americans and Mexican Americans in Riverside before arriving in Orange County, presumably to make the same attempt. Tarango refuted the charges, but as the allegations spread, Ross knew his organizing efforts in Orange County would go no further.¹⁰²

Ross relocated to San Diego and organized a Unity League with Japanese American members who he encouraged to unite with Mexican Americans and African Americans. Ross had been employed by the American Council on Race Relations for almost one year, but most of his time had been devoted to organizing the Unity Leagues. In Chicago, some of the directors of the ACRR questioned the overtly political nature of this work, and one board member happened to tell a friend, Saul Alinsky, that Ross's position was going to be cut. "The complaint about Ross," Alinsky recalled, "was that he was always organizing."¹⁰³

Known for his own community organizing successes in Chicago during the 1930s, Alinsky had joined with Bishop Bernard James Sheil and businessman Marshall Field III to create the Industrial Areas Foundation in 1940. Alinsky was looking for someone to organize mineworkers in Montana, so he met with Ross in Los Angeles and offered him the assignment. Ross was interested. He had read Alinsky's book, *Reveille for Radicals* (1946), and he understood that Alinsky's "radicals" were not followers of Marx and Lenin—they were Americans who embraced the legacies of Jefferson, John Brown, and William Jennings Bryan. For Alinsky, radicals were "democrats" who worked tirelessly to minimize the power of "aristocrats" while maximizing the power of ordinary people. But wealthy aristocrats were not the only threat to American democracy. Alinsky chastised labor union leaders who had grown too comfortable with the status quo and middle-class liberals who would risk nothing to change it. He also warned about Communists who believed in empowering government officials more than the people themselves. In response to these threats, Alinsky advocated the creation of organizations among individuals with shared interests, the creation of coalitions among these various organizations, and then the union of these coalitions behind a defined political agenda. This process started with

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 65-74; García, *Mexican Americans*, 101-04; García, *World of Its Own*, 234-37; Brilliant, *Color of America*, 58. López quoted in García, *Mexican Americans*, 101.

¹⁰² Fred Ross, untitled manuscript (n.d.), 3-14, 42, Box 22, Folder 2, Fred Ross Papers, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California; Hector Tarango, interview by Gilbert Padilla, Long Beach, California, November 15, 2005, transcript in author's possession; Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 75-79; Christopher Arriola, "Knocking on the Schoolhouse Door: *Mendez v. Westminster*, Equal Protection, Public Education, and Mexican Americans in the 1940s," *La Raza Law Journal* 8 (1995): 187; Humberto Garza, *Organizing the Chicano Movement: The Story of CSO* (Sanger, CA: Sun House Publishing, 2009), unpaginated ch. 3; Gonzales, "Hector Tarango," 55-66; Aguirre, *LULAC Project*, 136.

¹⁰³ Brilliant, *Color of America*, 117; Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 78. Alinsky quoted in Dunne, *Delano*, 56.

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citizenship and voter registration, and it culminated, year after year, with results on election day. When they met in spring 1947, Ross told Alinsky he had been creating organizations and coalitions for the past year, and he wanted to continue this work in East Los Angeles. Alinsky agreed to let him do so, with the understanding that the position would not be paid until Alinsky could raise funds from donors.¹⁰⁴

By summer 1947, Ross was spending most of his time in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of East Los Angeles. Alinsky had connected him with Edward Roybal, a Mexican American social worker and World War II veteran who ran for the Ninth District seat on the Los Angeles City Council but finished third in the primary election in May. A month after Roybal's defeat, the core members of the "Committee to Elect Edward Roybal" reorganized themselves as the "Community Political Organization." Admiring their resilience, Ross suggested that their work had only begun. He encouraged them to build their membership base and begin registering the thousands of unregistered Mexican American voters in and beyond Boyle Heights before preparing for the next election. He also offered his own services as a professional organizer. Although Roybal trusted Alinsky, some of Roybal's supporters suspected that Ross might be a Communist and asked him to prove he was not. Back in Chicago, Alinsky conferred with Bishop Sheil, who then called Bishop Joseph McGucken in Los Angeles. After meeting with Ross, McGucken agreed to provide a letter not only confirming that Ross was not a Communist but also offering the Archdiocese's endorsement of his efforts—the first formal tie between the Catholic Church and Ross's new organization. By the end of the summer, Alinsky had secured Ross's funding. Because the Industrial Areas Foundation was nonpartisan and tax-exempt, however, Alinsky asked Ross to de-emphasize the organization's political work. Roybal and his supporters agreed to another name change and welcomed Ross as a full-time organizer. In September 1947 they launched the Community Service Organization.¹⁰⁵

From the outset, the CSO was characterized by its inclusivity, responsiveness, and rapid growth. Many of the earliest members of the CSO were business owners or professionals, and many younger members were college students, but the CSO also attracted working-class men and women by cultivating alliances with organized labor. CSO leader Tony Ríos, for example, reached out to his fellow local members of the CIO-affiliated United Steel Workers, almost a third of whom were ethnic Mexicans, and he lobbied the union to assign two staff members to CSO support roles. Likewise, CSO leader María Durán recruited fellow female members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the AFL-affiliated union donated the time of one of its own talented organizers, Hope Mendoza. Meanwhile, other CSO members joined Ross in knocking on doors, starting conversations, and setting up informal neighborhood meetings in the homes of volunteer hosts. These "house meetings," a cornerstone of Ross's organizing strategy, revolved around open discussions of the problems that the hosts and their neighbors faced, including discrimination, economic hardship, inferior schools, segregation, and police brutality. Night after night, Ross and other recruiters explained how the men and women who faced these problems could address them more effectively by addressing them together—through the CSO. Ross's strategy worked. By April 1948, CSO membership had grown from twenty dues-paying members to two hundred. A year later, membership was approaching one thousand.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Finks, *Radical Vision*, 29-37; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 67-80; Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946); Dunne, *Delano*, 53-56; Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 79-80; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 85-88; Finks, *Radical Vision*, 39-41; Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky: His Life and Legacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 225-30; Kenneth C. Burt, *The Search For a Civic Voice: California Latino Politics* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 2007), 53-62; Kenneth C. Burt, "The Battle For Standard Coil: The United Electrical Workers, the Community Service Organization, and the Catholic Church in Latino East Los Angeles," in *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture*, ed. Robert Cherny, William Issel, and Kiernan Walsh Taylor (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 124-25; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 2; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 86; Chávez, "¡Mi Raza Primero!", 12-13; Brilliant, *Color of America*, 133.

¹⁰⁶ Burt, *Search*, 66; Margaret Rose, "Gender and Civic Activism in Mexican American Barrios in California: The Community Service Organization, 1947-1962," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 183-85; Chávez, "¡Mi Raza Primero!", 13; Katherine Underwood, "Pioneering

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With a growing membership base, the CSO began its first voter registration drive in January 1948, when forty-nine CSO members were sworn in as deputy registrars. In small teams that included at least one man and one woman, these volunteers canvassed precinct after precinct, night after night, for more than three months. As writer Beatrice Griffith noted at the time, they also set up tables in front of nearby Catholic churches every Sunday morning. As in all CSO activities, women played a significant role. “We just went out, door to door, literally door to door,” Hope Mendoza recalled. This is why the CSO “had the greatest impact in terms of grass roots.” The Ninth District was home to some 38,000 ethnic Mexicans in the late 1940s. In the 1947 primary election, Roybal had received only 3,300 votes (15 percent of the total). In 1948 and 1949, the CSO registered more than 15,000 new voters in East Los Angeles, most of whom were Mexican Americans. When Roybal ran again in 1949, he finished first in the primary election with 12,000 votes, and he defeated the incumbent in a run-off election with 20,500 votes (63 percent of the total), becoming the first Mexican American elected to the Los Angeles City Council since the 1880s. Roybal’s campaign focused on issues that resonated with a broad swath of voters in the Ninth District, but Roybal’s victory was widely recognized as a victory for Mexican Americans. Moreover, it put the CSO in a position to become the ascendant civil rights organization for all ethnic Mexicans in the American West during the 1950s.¹⁰⁷

As the CSO continued to grow during the early 1950s—with new chapters in Northern California and a membership approaching 4,000—the distinctiveness of its appeal became clear. LULAC, the largest Mexican American civil rights organization at the time, cultivated strong, middle-class, male leadership. It also perpetuated the marginalization of women, workers, and non-citizens, and it advocated conservative positions on immigration policy and other Cold War issues. ANMA, the strongest organization on the political left, was more inclusive of women, workers, and immigrants. ANMA was not controlled by Communists, as opponents charged, but its advocacy of labor rights and other “radical” positions aligned the organization with the Communist Party, at least enough to fuel suspicions and limit its growth. The CSO charted a middle course. Unlike LULAC, the CSO recruited members and adopted positions that reflected a broad sense of social equality and human dignity. Unlike ANMA, the CSO distanced itself from Communists, emphasizing instead a nonpartisan support for civic engagement. And unlike either organization, the CSO developed close ties to the Catholic Church—first in Los Angeles and then, even more deliberately, in San Jose.¹⁰⁸

While LULAC excluded non-citizens, ostracized braceros, and emphasized the “American” identities of its members, the CSO welcomed non-citizens, advocated for braceros, and recruited a diverse membership. In 1953 CSO membership was 85 percent ethnic Mexican, with one non-citizen for every three citizens. The remaining 15 percent was a mix of African Americans, Jews, and other allies. To be sure, the CSO championed U.S. citizenship, offering hundreds of citizenship classes and English classes throughout the 1950s. But the CSO showed respect for all ethnic Mexican men and women by conducting meetings in Spanish and English, offering its services to citizens and non-citizens alike, challenging restrictive laws such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, and denouncing deportation campaigns such as “Operation Wetback” in 1954. Ultimately, the CSO refused to let citizenship status become an issue when injustice demanded a response. When the pattern of police brutality in Los Angeles came to light after the “Bloody Christmas” beatings of four ethnic Mexican men in December 1951 and the beating of CSO leader Tony Ríos in January 1952, for example, the CSO issued the loudest calls for justice and reform—knowing that police brutality was a matter of concern

Minority Representation: Edward Roybal and the Los Angeles City Council, 1949-1962,” *Pacific Historical Review* 66, no. 3 (1997): 406; Beatrice Griffith, “Viva Roybal—Viva America,” *Common Ground* 10, no. 1 (1949): 64-65.

¹⁰⁷ Griffith, “Viva Roybal,” 63, 65-67; Burt, *Search*, 70-71; Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!”, 13-14; Rose, “Gender and Civic Activism,” 190-91; Underwood, “Pioneering,” 411-12; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 169. Mendoza quoted in Rose, “Gender and Civic Activism,” 191.

¹⁰⁸ Kaplowitz, *LULAC*, 36-61; Marquez, *LULAC*, 39-60; Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 196-230; García, *Mexican Americans*, 199-227.

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for all men and women, regardless of whether the victims were citizens. This approach fueled the CSO's appeal, especially among Mexican immigrants. By 1960 more than 40,000 immigrants would turn to the CSO for assistance with naturalization.¹⁰⁹

On the other side of the political spectrum, ANMA carried an air of association with the Communist Party—primarily because FBI agents decided that many of its members had “sympathies” with Communist aims, and ANMA leaders were unwilling to refute the charges. The CSO, however, inherited Alinsky's anti-Communism and then burnished its own anti-Communist credentials as it grew. Alinsky had worked with Communists during the Great Depression, but he had no interest in joining the Communist Party and sacrificing his intellectual freedom—an aversion he proved to Bishop Sheil in the 1930s and to investigators working for Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. Fred Ross and other CSO leaders shared this aversion. When Tony Ríos's case against the Los Angeles Police Department went to trial in February 1952, for example, the CSO newsletter praised him as “a leader in the political affairs of the district, an outstanding member of the CIO, a life-long devout Catholic, . . . and one of the staunchest anti-Communists of the community.” There is no reason to doubt that CSO denunciations of Communism were sincere, but they also were shrewd. As Bert Corona recognized, the CSO's anti-Communism provided leverage when it came to recruiting members, securing donations, and fending off opposition from the right and from the left. “One thing I didn't like [about the CSO],” Corona explained, “was that one of its stated reasons for organizing was to keep the ‘reds’ from establishing a base in the communities. I knew that when they referred to ‘reds,’ they meant those Mexicans who were either working with the CP or involved with ANMA.” The CSO's anti-Communism hurt potential allies on the left. Yet given the context of the Cold War, anti-Communism fueled the CSO's continuing ascendance.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, the CSO's close ties to the Catholic Church set the organization apart. Certainly, LULAC and other organizations counted leaders and members who were devout Catholics. Alonso Perales, for example, was a founder and early president of LULAC whose Catholic faith inspired a lifetime of civil rights and social justice work. Yet as an organization, LULAC called for a separation of religion and politics. ANMA encouraged ethnic Mexican cultural pride but likewise kept its distance from the Catholic Church. Just as the CSO inherited Alinsky's anti-Communism, however, it also inherited the alliance with the Church he originally forged on behalf of immigrant workers in Chicago. Bishop McGucken's letter endorsing Fred Ross's efforts in East Los Angeles established the relationship between the Church and the CSO. In the months to come, the relationship grew stronger with the appointment of Monsignor Thomas O'Dwyer to the CSO's advisory committee and Father William Barry to the executive board. O'Dwyer was the pastor at St. Mary's Church, the largest church in Boyle Heights. He represented Archbishop John Cantwell on the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking and took a special interest in Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation and the CSO. Barry, an assistant pastor at St. Mary's, shared O'Dwyer's enthusiasm and cultivated support from other local members of the clergy.¹¹¹

As Catholic officials throughout California and the Southwest grappled with “the Mexican question” in the late 1940s, an alliance with the CSO held great appeal, especially as the organization expanded beyond Los Angeles. The emerging Cold War made the alliance mutually beneficial. Speaking on behalf of the CSO, Saul

¹⁰⁹ García, *World of Its Own*, 235; Rose, “Gender,” 180; Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, 142-44; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 165-72; Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!”, 21-25; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 4; Kenneth C. Burt, “Tony Rios and Bloody Christmas: A Turning Point Between the Los Angeles Police Department and the Latino Community,” *Western Legal History* 14 (2001): 159-92.

¹¹⁰ Finks, *Radical Vision*, 16-17, 58; García, *Mexican Americans*, 222-27; García, *Memories*, 170, 189-91; Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, 156-64. CSO newsletter quoted in Burt, “Tony Rios,” 178. Corona quoted in García, *Memories*, 164.

¹¹¹ Orozco, *No Mexicans*, 111-14, 168; García, *Católicos*, 53-77; García, *Mexican Americans*, 215-18; Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, 160-62; Burt, “Battle,” 124-29, 135; Burt, *Search*, 63-64.

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Alinsky often proclaimed: “We’re not a Communist organization. We know all about the commies, and . . . [they] don’t fool us one bit. We’re out here to organize the Spanish-speaking,” doing so, he stressed, “in conjunction with the Catholic Church.” This alliance helped define the CSO. With McCarthyism taking hold, ANMA faced unbearable pressure and collapsed in 1954. Around the same time, LULAC began to follow CSO leadership on a number of issues. The larger organization continued to marginalize women and exclude non-citizens, but after acknowledging the devastating impact that Operation Wetback had on immigrant families, businesses, and entire communities, LULAC began to offer more English classes and more citizenship classes—in Spanish and English. By these measures, the CSO was the ascendant civil rights organization for ethnic Mexicans in the 1950s. Fred Ross, Cesar Chavez, and a new CSO chapter organized among ethnic Mexican Catholics in East San Jose were central to that ascendance.¹¹²

Fred Ross, Cesar Chavez, and the CSO in San Jose, 1952-1954

Forces associated with agricultural production, the marginalization of ethnic Mexicans, and the growth of the American Catholic Church helped bring Cesar Chavez and Father Donald McDonnell together in East San Jose in 1952. They formed a relationship that allowed Chavez to develop his intellectual understanding of injustice and his determination to fight against it—what he later called his “will to struggle.” Fred Ross came to East San Jose to organize a new chapter of the CSO just as Chavez and McDonnell were getting to know one another. McDonnell’s influence on Chavez was profound, but Chavez credited Ross with teaching him how to turn his embrace of modern Catholic social doctrine into action. “The first practical steps [in the fight for social justice],” Chavez noted, “I learned from the best organizer I know, Fred Ross. I first met him in Sal Si Puedes. He changed my life.” The relationship between Chavez and McDonnell would reverberate within the Mexican American civil rights movement and then the farmworker movement; so would the relationship between Chavez and Ross.¹¹³

When Ross first arrived in East San Jose, he was not a paid organizer for the CSO. Personal tragedies led Saul Alinsky to suspend his fundraising efforts in summer 1950, and Ross soon lost his salary. He stayed with the CSO as a volunteer for a few more months before casting about for new opportunities. Ross’s earlier work with the American Council on Race Relations (ACRR) eventually led to him to the California Federation for Civic Unity (CFCU), a multiracial civil rights organization formed in 1945 by representatives of the ACRR, members of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and other social justice advocates. Ross agreed to become the executive director of the CFCU in spring 1952, but he did so with the understanding that he would “devote whatever time was available” to organizing new chapters of the CSO in Northern California. Ross decided to start in San Jose for several reasons. First, he already knew Father McDonnell. When McDonnell and his colleague John Duggan were developing their plans for the Spanish Mission Band in 1949, they met with Ross in Los Angeles and encouraged him to carry his work north. After Ross took the position with the CFCU, the first person he went to see in East San Jose was McDonnell. “I didn’t speak Spanish then,” Ross recalled. “Father McDonnell took me around . . . meeting people and getting the feel of the community.” Second, Ross knew that Ernesto Galarza had chosen San Jose as his own base of operations, and he recognized an affinity between Galarza’s work on behalf of ethnic Mexicans and his own. Third, Ross had a connection to Claude Settles, a sociology professor at San Jose State College. As a founding member of the San Jose Council for Civic Unity and an active member of the AFSC, Settles was involved with the CFCU. When Ross began his organizing work in East San Jose in May 1952, Settles invited him to speak to the students taking his class on race relations.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, 162-63; García, *Mexican Americans*, 37-38; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 164-67. Alinsky statement quoted in García, *Memories*, 164.

¹¹³ Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 27 and 93.

¹¹⁴ Thompson, *America’s Social Arsonist*, 109-11; Finks, *Radical Vision*, 49; Brilliant, *Color of America*, 16, 86-87; Taylor, *Chavez*

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Three Mexican American students in Settles's class—Herman Gallegos, Alicia Hernández, and Leonard Ramírez—were immediately intrigued by Ross's discussion of the CSO, including its response to "Bloody Christmas" and the indictment of eight Los Angeles police officers just a few weeks before Ross spoke in their classroom. They told Ross they wanted to organize a CSO chapter and elected Hernández to lead their effort. Hernández was a public health nurse in East San Jose's Mayfair district. She was a quiet leader, but Gallegos remembered that her knowledge of the community and her friendship with Father McDonnell were "very key." Gallegos's own leadership would be important as well. Born in a Colorado mining town in 1930, Gallegos grew up in San Francisco and attended San Francisco State College before transferring to San Jose State College in 1950. Although he would take a position as a social worker with the Santa Clara County Welfare Department soon after he graduated in May 1952, he paid his way through college by working as a gas station attendant in East San Jose. Like other Mexican Americans, Gallegos had faced discrimination and hardship, but he also benefitted from the kindness of strangers. As a boy, he was playing near railroad tracks when an accident cost him part of his left leg. A charitable organization arranged for a prosthesis that restored his mobility—doing so, he later emphasized, in a way that also maintained his family's sense of dignity. Gallegos was eager to carry the same approach into his own career as a social worker and community leader.¹¹⁵

Shortly after Gallegos's initial meeting with Ross, Jessie De La O invited him to one of Ross's first house meetings in East San Jose. De La O's father, Frank, owned the only grocery store in Sal Si Puedes and her mother, Macaria, was one of the women who had submitted a petition to Archbishop John Mitty calling for a Mexican national parish. Ross met them through McDonnell, and in their home—and in dozens more in the weeks to come, often accompanied by McDonnell or Hernández—Ross spent time talking about the CSO in Los Angeles, the problems its members faced, and the actions they took in response. He spent even more time listening. Night after night, Eastside residents told him stories about discrimination, economic hardship, overcrowding in the barrios, inferior schools, unpaved roads, the lack of safe playgrounds for their children, and the frequent flooding of Silver Creek. Ross asked them if they were registered to vote, and he gauged their interest in building a new chapter of the CSO. He asked for volunteers to host more house meetings and sought the names of other men and women who might join the effort.¹¹⁶

Alicia Hernández encouraged Ross to contact Helen Chavez and her husband, Cesar. The young couple had returned to East San Jose from Crescent City a couple of months earlier. They had three young children, and Helen was pregnant with their fourth. With McDonnell's support, Hernández had recently opened a weekly well-baby clinic in Tremont Hall, and she befriended Helen and Cesar as well as Richard and his wife Sally, who also took their young children to the clinic. Ross had a growing list of names, and it took him a few weeks to get to the Chavez house, but he finally met Cesar in early June 1952. Chavez was suspicious of Ross's motives and avoided meeting him for a few days, but when they finally spoke, Chavez agreed to host a house meeting. Ross remembered how the meeting began:

I told Cesar and his buddies I had worked all over Southern California. And wherever I went the conditions among Mexican Americans were as bad as in Sal Si Puedes. The same polluted creeks. . . .

and the Farm Workers, 80; Duggan, "My Mind," 23; Gallegos, interview, 2012; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 150; Herbert G. Ruffin II, *Uninvited Neighbors: African Americans in Silicon Valley, 1769-1990* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 101. Ross quoted in Brilliant, *Color of America*, 86, and Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 82.

¹¹⁵ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 150; Gallegos, interview, 2012; Herman Gallegos, interview by Gabrielle Morris, Berkeley, California, 1988, transcript in author's possession; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 5; Fred Ross, *Get Out If You Can: The Saga of Sal Si Puedes* (San Francisco: California Federation for Civic Unity, 1953), 7, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106013034241> (accessed May 30, 2016).

¹¹⁶ Gallegos, interview, 2012; Gallegos, interview, 1988; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 150-52; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 5; Pawel, *Crusades*, 33-34.

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The same mean streets and walkways and lack of street lights. . . . I didn't rabble-rouse; I just talked quietly about what I had done helping the people of Riverside and Redlands, in the Casa Blanca and El Modena barrios. . . . And how, on the eastside of Los Angeles, the people built their own civic-action organization (the CSO), which went to work on their problems as well as registering neighbors to vote. . . . I told them about the CSO's response to Bloody Christmas. . . . If the people of Los Angeles could do it, I said, there was no reason why we couldn't do the same sort of thing in Sal Si Puedes.

Chavez was deeply impressed. Ross "knew the problems as well as we did," Chavez later explained. "I didn't know what the CSO was or who this guy Fred Ross was, but I knew about the Bloody Christmas case, and so did everybody in that room." Chavez tested Ross, asking him whether the CSO could serve farmworkers. Ross explained that even the poorest people could build power by working together. Chavez wanted to know about the next steps and volunteered to help. Later that night, Ross recorded his first impressions in his journal: "Chavez has real push. Understanding. Loyalty and Enthusiasm. Grassroots leadership quality." Years later, Ross paraphrased: "I think I've found the guy I'm looking for."¹¹⁷

The day after Chavez hosted a house meeting, Ross launched the first voter registration drive in the history of East San Jose. The Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters initially denied Ross's request to appoint a Spanish-speaking Deputy Registrar, but after a few weeks of pressure, Jessie De La O secured the position. Chavez, Gallegos, Hernández, and other volunteers started going door-to-door, identifying people who were not registered and sending De La O to their homes. Chavez was the only volunteer to show up every evening—some nights he was the only volunteer—and his dedication led to the registration of 4,000 new voters by the end of the summer. More immediately, his dedication helped other men and women see him as an emerging leader. When plans were made for a meeting to formally establish a new CSO chapter, Chavez decided to run for vice president while Gallegos ran for president. The meeting was held in early August 1952 in the auditorium of the local elementary school. More than 150 people were in attendance, and Hernández chaired the meeting. Father McDonnell offered an invocation, those running for positions delivered speeches, and Ross reviewed the accomplishments of the CSO in Los Angeles. Despite running against more prominent candidates, Gallegos and Chavez were elected. They were surprised, but Ross assured them their victories reflected the members' recognition of their hard work. As the chapter continued to grow through the summer and into the fall, they and other members agreed to "develop ourselves and our neighborhoods," to "prevent violation of human rights," and to "achieve full participation in civic affairs." They joined committees dedicated to voter registration, citizenship, education, health, social services, neighborhood improvements, public relations, and social events.¹¹⁸

Gallegos's election as president was an important moment in his life. He was embarking upon a career as a social worker, but his civil rights activism would continue. In the years to come he would serve as national CSO president, and he would help launch the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). Given the earlier trajectory of Chavez's life, his election as vice president might be considered even *more* of a turning point. A few months earlier, Chavez was carrying the responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood back to East San Jose after yet another failed attempt to find economic security. He recognized injustice and sensed

¹¹⁷ McDonnell, interview; Fred Ross, *Conquering Goliath: Cesar Chavez at the Beginning* (Keene, CA: El Taller Grafico, 1989), 2-4; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 97-99, 101-02; Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 83; Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 44-46; Pawel, *Crusades*, 27-28. Ross quote from Ross, *Conquering Goliath*, 3. Chavez quoted in Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 45. Ross journal quoted in Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 83.

¹¹⁸ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 102-03; Gallegos, interview, 2012; Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 47; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 5; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 152; Pawel, *Crusades*, 34-35; "CSO Committee Functions," UFW Office of the President Cesar Chavez Collection, Part 1, Box 2, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit (hereafter ALUA, WSU). CSO agenda quoted in Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 152.

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the need to unite with others to confront it, but he was teetering on the verge of despair. His election, however, indicated that his life was about to change from that of a struggling laborer to that of a community organizer and civil rights leader. The creation of the new San Jose chapter likewise was a turning point in the history of the CSO. If the organization had failed to grow beyond Southern California, its place in the Mexican American civil rights movement might have been fleeting—and the movement as a whole might have lost its postwar momentum. Instead, the creation of the San Jose chapter put the CSO on sound footing in Northern California and, as historian Stephen Pitti has noted, this new chapter “sparked a CSO wildfire” that would begin to spread throughout California and into Arizona.¹¹⁹

Ross recognized the importance of these events. In his closing remarks at the founding meeting in August 1952, he retold the parable of the sower who scattered seeds and saw that some seeds were eaten by birds, some were lost among the stones and thorns, and some fell on fertile soil and eventually provided abundant fruit. Ross wanted to commend those in attendance for hearing his message, but he might not have appreciated just how fertile the soil was throughout the barrios of the Mayfair district. Ethnic Mexicans who had forged bonds of family and friendship, supported each other in the face of discrimination, and helped each other endure economic hardship had created a community that was ready to mobilize around a political agenda. As historian Gina Pitti has argued, many of these men and women had found a crucial training ground for that mobilization within the Catholic Church. In order to understand why the CSO took root in East San Jose and became so fruitful, Pitti’s research suggests, we must understand how Catholic social doctrine fueled and sustained a deep yearning for justice—not just for Cesar Chavez, but for thousands of ethnic Mexican Catholics in East San Jose and perhaps hundreds of thousands throughout the American West. Moreover, we must understand how those who had been moved to make demands upon Catholic officials had gained the confidence to make demands upon public officials. “The convictions, networks, and leadership skills forged through interactions with Catholic officials,” Pitti explains, “fostered the laity’s transition from Church to community activism.” In East San Jose specifically, the ongoing struggle for a Mexican national parish began to intersect with the broader ethnic Mexican struggle for civil rights and social justice. From the standpoint of Chavez and other emerging activists, in fact, these struggles were inseparable.¹²⁰

The new CSO chapter continued to grow in the coming year, with a membership that approached 400 by summer 1953. The voter registration committee sustained its work in advance of the November 1952 elections—securing five additional Deputy Registrars in the process—and the committee launched another registration drive in 1953. When members of this committee realized how many men and women were not registered because they were not citizens, the citizenship committee began to offer citizenship classes and one-on-one assistance with the naturalization process. (In doing so, they took advantage of a provision in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 allowing immigrants over the age of fifty who had lived in the U.S. for at least twenty years to take the citizenship exam in their native language.) Meanwhile, the health committee conducted investigations and found 125 confirmed cases of amoebic dysentery in the Mayfair district, all within a few blocks of Silver Creek. Armed with this information, the neighborhood improvements committee began calling upon public officials to provide paved roads and sewers as well as sidewalks and streetlights throughout East San Jose. Fred Ross assisted with all of this early work, primarily with advice and encouragement. Father McDonnell assisted as well—not only attending CSO meetings and providing space at Tremont Hall, but also having long conversations about civil rights and social justice with Chavez and Gallegos after their CSO meetings and after they accompanied him on his own weekly trips to minister to farmworkers in the labor camps and men in the county jail.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 152.

¹²⁰ Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 5; Gallegos, interview, 2012; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 155; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 6, 19, and passim; García, *Católicos*, 53-77.

¹²¹ Pitt, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 152, 162-69; Burt, *Search*, 136; McDonnell, interview; Gallegos, interview, 2012; Gallegos, interview,

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As Ross and McDonnell came to know Chavez during that first year, they were struck by the depth of his commitment to the principles of the CSO and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Chavez “showed tremendous perseverance right from the very beginning,” Ross remembered. Ross did not yet know what was driving Chavez, but “all of his actions were invested with a tremendous amount of urgency.” To some extent, Chavez simply wanted to help people, and he was gaining confidence in his ability to do so. During the first voter registration drive, Chavez had led the fight for additional Deputy Registrars. After voters faced intimidation at the polls, Ross drafted a letter to the state attorney general and Chavez volunteered to sign it. So, when Chavez was laid off from his job at the box factory at the beginning of 1953, he naturally devoted even more time to helping people with their problems, including those that required him to confront public officials. As the work of the citizenship committee gained steam, for example, Chavez helped men and women complete their naturalization forms. Other Eastside residents needed his advocacy. “Maybe they were not getting enough welfare aid, or their check was taken away, or their kids were thrown out of school,” Chavez explained. “Maybe they had been taken by crooked salesmen selling fences, aluminum siding, or freezers that hold food for a month.” Chavez spent countless hours assisting people. He also wasted countless hours driving around to see them, so he worked with Ross to open a small CSO office on East Santa Clara Street—a “service center” where people could bring their problems to him. As the hours mounted, Chavez began to grapple with the difference between “being of service” and “being a servant.” Being of service meant helping people according to his own schedule. In the coming years, he would make the decision to become a servant, putting the people and their needs ahead of his own needs and those of his family. The consequences would be difficult for his family, but Ross and McDonnell—and Helen—would approve.¹²²

In the meantime, Chavez was trying to figure out the best means of helping people. He knew he could continue to provide personal assistance. He also understood that individuals and families might escape poverty on their own through hard work and good fortune. But Chavez wanted to help entire groups of people, not just individuals, and he wanted to empower those groups to improve their own lives and the lives of others. In other words, he wanted to learn how to organize people, be they Mexican Americans, farmworkers, the poor, or any other group, so that they could build the power necessary to produce broader social change. Ross offered to teach him. In the first few weeks after they met, Chavez had observed “the things Fred did” because he “wanted to learn how to organize, to see how it was done.” In the weeks and months to come, he continued to observe, he asked questions, and he began to learn. “A lot of people worked with [Ross] . . . but few learned what I learned,” Chavez later explained. “I think the reason was that I had more *need* to learn than anybody else. I really *had* to learn.”¹²³

Working with Ross, Chavez learned about power and empowerment. As Saul Alinsky recalled, he and Ross taught people that “there is something you can do about [the conditions you face] . . . but you have to have power to do it. And you’ll only get power through organization. Because power just goes to two poles—to those who’ve got money, and those who’ve got people. You haven’t got money,” they observed, “so your own fellowmen are your source of strength.” This lesson reinforced what Father McDonnell had stressed about farmworkers in particular. “Farmworkers are weak,” Chavez remembered McDonnell explaining, and “the only thing that is going to bring about justice . . . for them is by gaining some kind of strength.” With Ross, Chavez also learned about people and how to organize them. For example, he learned that when he helped people, they

1988.

¹²² Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 105, 109-10; Cesar Chavez to Honorable Edmund G. Brown, November 12, 1952, UFW Office of the President Cesar Chavez Collection, Part I, Box 2, Folder 2, ALUA, WSU; Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, eds., *The Words of César Chávez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 171; Pawel, *Crusades*, 35, 47. Ross quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 102. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 110.

¹²³ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 89, 109-110. Chavez quoted in Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 84. Chavez quoted in Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 47.

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often repaid him with their loyalty. He redirected this loyalty to other men and women by way of the CSO. “Once I realized helping people was an organizing technique,” Chavez explained, “I increased that work. I was willing to work day and night and go to hell and back for people—provided they also did something for the CSO in return.” Ethnic Mexican Catholics who, like Chavez, saw their faith as an activist faith were particularly receptive to this arrangement. Chavez helped them and other men and women, but he asked for nothing in return. He simply encouraged them to help one another. Every time they did so, they strengthened their shared sense of community and solidarity. They also strengthened the CSO.¹²⁴

Ultimately, Chavez learned about himself and what he might be capable of accomplishing. Back in Chicago, Alinsky secured new funding to support the CSO, and he re-hired Ross in August 1953. Ross then cobbled together funding to hire Chavez as his assistant. As Ross organized new CSO chapters in Salinas, Fresno, and San Bernardino, Chavez stayed in San Jose but began organizing in Oakland and other nearby cities. He would make many mistakes, but Ross would help him learn from them. By March 1954—nearly two years before the Montgomery bus boycott and almost three years before the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta—Ross and Chavez had organized enough CSO chapters to hold a convention near Monterey, during which the members would formally launch the national organization, establish organizational priorities, and elect a slate of officers, including Herman Gallegos, Alicia Hernández, and Hector Moreno from East San Jose. The CSO was developing into the ascendant civil rights organization for ethnic Mexicans in the American West, and Chavez’s leadership developed along with it, eventually earning him the position of executive director of the CSO. At the time and decades later, Chavez acknowledged his debt to Fred Ross, the man who inspired him, mentored him, believed in him, and became his best friend.¹²⁵

Cesar Chavez began to emerge as a community organizer and civil rights leader at a particular time and in a particular place, and this context is important. By the 1950s, ethnic Mexicans had faced a century of hardship and discrimination in the American West. Their first organized efforts to respond—in Texas during the 1920s and Southern California during the 1930s—laid the foundation for a new civil rights movement. After World War II, the efforts associated with larger organizations such as LULAC and smaller, grassroots organizations that fought school desegregation battles coalesced into a regional civil rights movement. The Cold War then created a context within which the CSO would become ascendant, especially given the organization’s close ties to the Catholic Church. Given the prior work of organizations such as El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Español and the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, the CSO’s growth in Los Angeles was not surprising. In San Jose, the CSO’s rapid growth also reflected the legacy of prior and ongoing struggles for equality, including struggles within the Catholic Church. One of those struggles revolved around the widespread desire among Mexican Catholics for “a church of their own.” Lay leaders in the barrios of the Mayfair district wanted a Mexican national parish, and they continued to press for one even after Father McDonnell began celebrating Mass in Tremont Hall and serving as pastor in residence in fall 1951. This struggle produced Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel—a building that would nurture Chavez’s sense of servanthood but also serve as the CSO’s home in Sal Si Puedes.

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In the late 1940s, Mexican Catholics in East San Jose began advocating for “a church of their own,” one with a nearby location and Spanish-language services. Like other Catholic officials at the time, Archbishop John Mitty

¹²⁴ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 109-12. Alinsky quoted in Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 79. Chavez quoted in Chavez, interview by McNamara; and in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 111.

¹²⁵ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 99, 112-22; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 152-53; Pawel, *Crusades*, 35-37; Finks, *Radical Vision*, 61-63; Jensen and Hammerback, eds., *Words*, 179.

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was concerned that a separate parish church would perpetuate a sense of segregation, so Father Donald McDonnell proposed a semi-autonomous mission chapel as a compromise. In 1953, McDonnell secured an older, surplused church building and a plot of land in Sal Si Puedes, and Chavez organized a crew of volunteers to help relocate and reconstruct the building. As McDonnell intended, the chapel building functioned as a parish church and a multipurpose center—providing vital space for religious services (including McDonnell’s ministry to braceros and other migrant workers) but also for a credit union, a health clinic, youth activities, and the civil rights activism of the Community Service Organization. The building gained national historical significance during the 1950s because of the struggle, perseverance, and victory it symbolized but also because it shaped Chavez’s sense of servanthood, spurred his emergence as a community organizer and civil rights leader, and inspired his work as one of the nation’s preeminent labor rights leaders. More broadly, it connected the Mexican American civil rights movement, the American Catholic Church, and the farmworker movement that Chavez himself would begin to lead in the early 1960s.

The Ongoing Fight For “A Church of Their Own”

Many of the women and men who joined the Community Service Organization in East San Jose in the early 1950s were the same women and men who had launched the campaign that would produce Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel. A mission chapel was not one of their original goals. As their petition to Archbishop John Mitty explained in 1950, they wanted a national parish with an ethnic Mexican pastor, Spanish-language services, and a parish church—not a mission chapel. Another decade would pass before they would have their own church, so the construction of a chapel might be seen simply as a milepost in this longer struggle. It might even be seen as a setback. From the community’s perspective, however, the chapel represented a victory, because it would *function* like a church, and their priest, Father Donald McDonnell, would act not only as their pastor but also as a tireless ally in their ongoing fight for civil rights and social justice. Ultimately, the overarching goal that Mexican Catholics in East San Jose worked toward during the 1940s and 1950s was better treatment—for themselves and for all other ethnic Mexicans throughout California and the Southwest. Guadalupe Mission Chapel would become an enduring symbol of this broader struggle and its achievements.

The campaign for a Mexican national parish in East San Jose emerged within the same historical context that sparked the formation of the Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking in 1945 and the San Francisco Archdiocese’s own Spanish Mission Band in 1950. Mexican Catholics in the U.S. had faced decades of mistreatment. With U.S. entry into World War II and the full emergence of the Mexican American civil rights movement, they began to demand better treatment—but calls for wartime unity kept those demands in check. Even as the number of Mexican immigrants grew during the 1940s, Mexican Catholics found it difficult to practice their faith. The parish churches they were expected to attend often were located several miles from their homes and labor camps, those parishes often lacked Spanish-language services, and their parishioners sometimes made ethnic Mexicans feel unwelcomed. At the same time, Protestant denominations actively responded to these conditions. They established new churches in barrios and colonias, offered Spanish-language services at convenient times, and aggressively recruited new members. Given Protestant inroads into ethnic Mexican communities, Mexican Catholics themselves often felt compelled to respond.

In East San Jose, Baptists, Methodists, and other Protestant denominations established at least eight new churches during the 1940s. Still, a majority of ethnic Mexicans in the Mayfair district remained Catholic, including an overwhelming majority in Sal Si Puedes. As World War II drew to a close, a group of devout Catholics in Sal Si Puedes began to search for a Spanish-speaking priest and a nearby place to celebrate Mass. Technically, these women and men belonged to St. Patrick’s Parish in downtown San Jose, but St. Patrick’s did not offer Spanish-language services, and the distance was burdensome for those without reliable transportation.

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As they began to organize their campaign for “a church of their own” in the late 1940s, these lay leaders launched a home rosary service in the Mayfair district. Every Sunday evening, Mexican Catholics would gather in a someone’s home, set up a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, and pray the rosary. “Since the Mayfair barrios . . . had no neighborhood church to call their own,” historian Gina Pitti explains, lay leaders “promoted the devotion not only to venerate Mary but to encourage a sense of Catholic community. This rosary practice . . . was as much a neighborhood event as a private one, since it brought together a small community of relatives, neighbors, and friends.” The home rosary service aimed to maintain a shared Catholic identity in the absence of a nearby Catholic church (and in the face of those Protestant inroads), but lay leaders knew they were losing ground. As Pitti notes, lay leaders in East San Jose and elsewhere concluded that “the absence of formal church buildings made it impossible for residents to practice their religion fully or in a culturally meaningful way.” For them, home-based or neighborhood-based devotions were not enough. Neither was the rental of a small, dilapidated building like Tremont Hall. Mexican Catholics in East San Jose wanted a parish church.¹²⁶

Mexican Catholics formalized their request for a national parish in 1950 when they submitted a petition to Archbishop Mitty with 2,500 signatures. In doing so, they entered into a debate playing out within the American Catholic Church during the years between Judge Paul McCormick’s ruling in the *Méndez et al.* case (1946) and the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Did national parishes, established for specific immigrant communities, serve as instruments of inclusion and assimilation, or did they perpetuate segregation? Historian Jeffrey Burns explains that “the national parish had been the primary means used by the Church to assimilate and protect immigrants through the nineteenth century in the United States; it had provided a separate parish for each immigrant group, which had allowed them to adapt to American culture at their own pace, thereby enabling them to preserve the more positive aspects of their culture, especially the Catholic faith.” The Catholic Church continued to establish national parishes into the early twentieth century, including two in San Jose—Holy Family Parish for Italian immigrants in 1905 and Five Wounds Parish for Portuguese immigrants in 1914. In the decades to come, however, Catholic officials began to move away from the national parish approach. By the late 1940s, Mitty and other Church officials thought that a new national parish in East San Jose would perpetuate the segregation of ethnic Mexicans. Burns notes that the request for a national parish “was denied on the basis that Mexicans should be integrated into parish life rather than segregated.”¹²⁷

The Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking (BCSS) knew that the segregation of Mexican Catholics was a problem, but the BCSS response largely revolved around an increase in Spanish-language services within existing parishes. Recognizing the mobility and social marginalization of Mexican migrant workers, including braceros and undocumented immigrants, the Spanish Mission Band sought to integrate Mexican Catholics not only by calling them back to parish churches but also by going to meet them where they were—in the barrios, colonias, and labor camps—and by taking up the array of problems they faced. Their strategy involved existing parishes, but it revolved around the idea of opening new community centers in the barrios that lacked parish churches. These centers would be housed in buildings that could function as mission chapels and parish halls, providing space for religious services as well as social services and community activities. Father McDonnell envisioned at least five categories of activities that would complement religious services: liturgical (planning religious festivals), catechetical (religious education), vocational (with an emphasis on practical skills), recreational (including youth athletics), and organizational (with an emphasis on leadership training). The hybrid function of these community centers—religious and social—was important. As Gina Pitti explains, McDonnell and his fellow priests “deliberately established a variety of educational, devotional, recreational, and social welfare services that . . . would help parishioners maintain their Catholic loyalties while establishing the Church as the center of the neighborhood.” They hoped the community centers would “radiate out Catholic ideals” even as other services and activities “attracted both faithful and aloof co-religionists” back to the

¹²⁶ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 41, 141, 164; Clark, *Health*, 97.

¹²⁷ Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 167-68.

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broader parish community. Ideally, the centers would anchor the Church's presence within the barrio while "physically and culturally mark[ing] the neighborhood as a Catholic space."¹²⁸

Father McDonnell's strategy for ministry and integration in East San Jose moved forward in 1951 when Archbishop Mitty approved a Mass Station in Tremont Hall and then designated the entire Mayfair district a mission area, keeping it under the jurisdiction of St. Patrick's Parish but authorizing the establishment of a mission chapel and allowing McDonnell to serve as pastor in residence. McDonnell knew that Tremont Hall was ill-suited to function as a mission chapel or as the kind of community center he envisioned, so he began to lobby for a more suitable building—one he would refer to as the Center of Our Lady of Guadalupe (or Guadalupe Center) before it became better known as Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel. By the beginning of 1952, his request for a new building was nearing approval.¹²⁹

McDonnell wanted a better building, but he also knew that Mexican Catholics in East San Jose wanted a national parish. Many of them might have been satisfied with integration into parish life at St. Patrick's, Five Wounds, or Holy Family, but all of them lived with the daily reality of marginalization and mistreatment, and sometimes they even faced it when they entered these or other parish churches. An increase in Spanish-language services was a step in the right direction, but it was not the same as genuine integration. For them, even the establishment of a mission area under the jurisdiction of St. Patrick's seemed inadequate. As their petition to Archbishop Mitty explained, Mexican Catholics wanted their own parish church because they wanted to feel at ease as they worshipped alongside their neighbors, they did not want to worry about the pain and humiliation of discrimination, and they wanted to honor their own religious traditions, including veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In the years to come, others would continue this advocacy. Gina Pitti notes that some lay leaders "argued that national parishes bestowed institutional space and resources that would have fostered closer ties between ethnic Mexicans and the Church while nurturing community leadership and infrastructure. By their analysis, the absence of such parishes left Spanish-speaking Catholics to languish . . . in churches that were, at best, only nominally integrated, resulting in 'barrioization' within the Church that paralleled Mexicans' marginalization from mainstream American society." Mitty and other Church officials worried that a Mexican national parish would be a segregated parish. But Mexican Catholics already lived with segregation. For them, a national parish would offer a much-needed refuge but also a place from which to *fight* segregation.¹³⁰

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel emerged as a compromise—one that offered most of what Church officials sought and most of what the laity sought. The archdiocese ultimately recognized the building as the chapel for a particular type of mission, but the building functioned more like a parish church. Jeffrey Burns has identified four types of missions that ministered to ethnic Mexicans between the 1920s and the 1950s: "1) the rural mission which was attended from a central parish; 2) the urban mission that was within the boundaries of an 'Anglo' parish; 3) the urban mission that was officially a mission but operated as a parish, with a resident pastor and little reference to the 'parent' parish; and 4) the mission that eventually became a parish, resident pastor and all." Although Our Lady of Guadalupe began in the second category and moved into the fourth category, it was in the third category for most of the 1950s. "The third type of mission," Burns point out, "was somewhat rare. San Jose's Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel operated in this fashion during the decade 1952 to 1962. Father Donald McDonnell was in residence and operated as pastor, with little reference to . . . [the parish within which] it was a mission. Officially, however, it was regarded as a mission, not a parish." Archbishop

¹²⁸ John J. Mitty to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, February 16, 1951, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 56, 11, 55.

¹²⁹ Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 194-95; McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; Leo T. Maher to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, February 21, 1952, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, AASF.

¹³⁰ Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 191, 178; Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 166.

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Mitty had authorized the mission in East San Jose in January 1951. He also approved the Spanish Mission Band's requests for missions in Alviso, Union City, Hayward, and Stockton. McDonnell thought the establishment of these and other missions—if they were granted a high degree of autonomy—would diffuse requests for a national parish. With the mission chapel and the combination of religious and social services (including Spanish-language services), McDonnell suggested, “the people will be cared for without becoming involved with the problems of a national parish.”¹³¹

Mexican Catholics in East San Jose would not abandon their campaign for a national parish, but in the short term they would embrace Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission, the mission chapel, and the new resident pastor, Father McDonnell, as their own. They also would embrace Guadalupe Mission Chapel as a victory in their ongoing struggle for better treatment. Before 1951, the Church had not established much of a presence in East San Jose. Less than three years later, Mexican Catholics in the Mayfair district would have a Spanish-speaking priest and a building that functioned like a church of their own.

The Construction of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel, 1951-1953

Father McDonnell launched his effort to secure a new building for Mexican Catholics in East San Jose in January 1951, shortly after Archbishop Mitty approved the establishment of a Mass Station in Tremont Hall. McDonnell's effort encompassed several steps. He received Mitty's authorization for a new building and then began to seek funding and a central location. As he assessed the cost of constructing a new building in 1952, he learned that a parish on the west side of San Jose was willing to sell an older, surplus church building. After acquiring a parcel of land in Sal Si Puedes, McDonnell focused on the purchase as well as the relocation and reconstruction of this older building—and here, Cesar Chavez, his family members, and other Mayfair residents played invaluable roles as volunteers. Their collective efforts culminated in December 1953 with the dedication and consecration of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel.¹³²

When McDonnell asked Mitty to authorize the acquisition or construction of a new building in East San Jose, he did so in the context of the Spanish Mission Band's four-part plan to “bring the Church” to Mexican Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of San Francisco. First, McDonnell explained, he would identify ethnic Mexican communities and mark their boundaries on a map (as he had done already for the Mayfair district). Second, he would begin to cultivate lay leadership in those communities. Third, he would support lay leaders as they organized home-based or neighborhood-based devotions and other activities. Finally, he would establish a community center, in an appropriate building, for “welfare and clinic work, general instruction in homecraft and hygiene, group recreation, adult civic education, catechetical instruction for children, formation of cooperatives, weekly religious services, and Mass.” The most important part of the plan, McDonnell thought, would be the training of lay leaders—but he stressed that a suitable building would be needed in order to implement the plan in its entirety. In May 1951, Mitty approved McDonnell's request to move forward.¹³³

Mitty also responded favorably to McDonnell's report that a small building used as a Pentecostal church in Sal Si Puedes was for sale. At Mitty's request, the archdiocese's building committee inquired about the building and assessed its value, but the committee determined that purchasing a nearby lot and constructing a new building probably would be a better approach. That fall, after Mitty designated the Mayfair district a mission

¹³¹ Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 163-65; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 194-95; Rev. Donald McDonnell to Most Rev. John J. Mitty, February 15, 1951, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF.

¹³² Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 195, places these efforts in the context of other Spanish Mission Band efforts. See also Clark, *Health*, 99.

¹³³ Rev. Donald McDonnell to Most Rev. John J. Mitty, February 15, 1951, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF; Donald McDonnell, “Points of Discussion with Archbishop, May 16, 1951,” McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF.

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area within St. Patrick's Parish, McDonnell began working with St. Patrick's pastor, Monsignor Edward Maher, to define what they would need from a new building. McDonnell and Maher developed more detailed plans for a "Social Center and Clinic" and submitted them to the building committee, which approved the plans in February 1952. Monsignor Harold Collins, secretary of the committee, encouraged McDonnell and Maher to work with an architect to prepare preliminary sketches of a building. A few weeks later, the archbishop's office began to develop a funding proposal to submit to foundations and potential donors.¹³⁴

The news that St. Martin of Tours Parish would be willing to sell an unneeded church building soon altered McDonnell's and Maher's plans. Located two miles west of downtown San Jose, St. Martin's Parish was constructing a new church building in 1952. The pastor, Father Jeremiah Ryan, learned about McDonnell's efforts and offered to sell the parish's older church building with "all its pews, stained glass windows, and furnishings" to St. Patrick's Parish once the new building was completed the following spring.¹³⁵

Father McDonnell embraced the idea. The older building—a simple, one-story, wood-frame structure designed by San Jose architect Louis Lenzen—was constructed by Blair and Chase builders on West San Carlos Street (at Cleveland Avenue) in 1914. Originally a rectangular plan building with a front gable roof, the building was modified and enlarged in 1923. The addition of two modest wings created a cruciform floor plan with a width of 40 feet and an intersecting gable roof. At the same time, an increase in length to 100 feet allowed the parish to add a sacristy, move the altar further back, and install additional pews. Nearly thirty years later, McDonnell saw a building that appeared to be well maintained, but the building had benefitted from recent restoration work. In 1948, St. Martin's Parish hired San Jose architect Vincent Raney to oversee work on the building's interior spaces (vestibule, baptistry, nave, chancel, and sacristy) and its exterior. Raney's contract called for refurbishing, staining, and varnishing all wood dado rails, trim, and pews; repainting the walls (above the dado rails) and ceiling; refinishing all exposed pine flooring; refurbishing and painting all exterior wood and metal; and replacing the roof. The parish activity report for 1948 noted the completion of this work.¹³⁶

Confident he would negotiate a reasonable price for the building, McDonnell knew he also needed to acquire a suitable lot in the Mayfair district. The most prominent property owner in the area was the Mayfair Packing Company, founded in 1931 by Joseph Perrucci, an Italian Catholic who immigrated to the U.S. in the early twentieth century. Perrucci and his partner, Frank DiNapoli, agreed that their company could donate an acre of land in Sal Si Puedes—a triangular plot that hugged flood-prone Silver Creek but fronted on Kammerer Avenue, one block west of Tremont Hall. McDonnell might have continued searching for a better location, but Archbishop Mitty accepted the deed of gift in November 1952 and acknowledged the donation with an expression of appreciation to Perrucci and his company for their "interest in the welfare of the Mexican people and . . . aid to the Church in caring for them."¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Archbishop Mitty to Monsignor Collins, May 17, 1951, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Santa Clara County," AASF; Rev. Charles P. Hardemon to Monsignor Collins, May 25, 1951, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Santa Clara County," AASF; Harold E. Collins to Right Revered E. J. Maher, February 14, 1952, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Guadalupe Center, San Jose," AASF; Leo T. Maher to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, February 21, 1952, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, AASF.

¹³⁵ McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center.

¹³⁶ Untitled report on development of St. Martin of Tours Parish (n.d., ca. 1935), St. Martin's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; "Lenzen, Jacob and Son, Architects (Partnership)," <http://pcad.lib.washington.edu/firm/1548> (accessed May 30, 2016); "Jacob Lenzen, Prominent Architect of San Jose," <http://www.santaclararesearch.net/SCBIOS/jlenzen.html> (accessed May 30, 2016); Vincent G. Raney, "Specifications for Painting, Roofing, and Repair for St. Martin's Church" (July 13, 1948), St. Martin's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; "Parish Historical Report, Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 1948," St. Martin's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR.

¹³⁷ Deed of Gift, November 24, 1952, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Santa Clara County," AASF; John J. Mitty to Joseph P. Perrucci, March 5, 1953, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Santa Clara County," AASF.

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With the property secured, McDonnell turned his attention back to the negotiation with St. Martin's Parish. In December 1952, Father Ryan and Monsignor Maher agreed that \$1,000 was a fair price for the purchase of the older church building. (In fact, it was far below the \$9,700 that the owner of the smaller Pentecostal church building was seeking in 1951.) McDonnell notified the building committee, and Maher confirmed that St. Patrick's Parish was prepared to donate \$1,000 for the purchase. Maher noted that the building would be moved to the property on Kammerer Avenue, where it would be "located amongst the very poor Mexicans," giving them a place to "assemble for catechism, etc."¹³⁸

Once the building committee and then the archbishop approved the purchase agreement in March 1953, McDonnell began planning for the relocation and reconstruction of the building. He turned to Vincent Raney for help. Raney had managed the restoration of the building in 1948, but he also designed the new church for St. Martin's Parish, and his reputation as a specialist in church design was starting to grow. While Raney scoped out the work of reconstructing the building, including preparation of the foundation and site, he advised McDonnell to solicit bids for the work of moving the building itself. John Pursley, a general contractor, provided plans and reasonable cost estimates for the relocation and reconstruction work. McDonnell decided to hire him, with the understanding that he would work under Raney's supervision and that he would utilize donated materials and volunteer labor from the parish community. By the middle of May 1953, Pursley had applied for a city permit for the relocation of the building. (Pursley's crew would dismantle the building and move it in sections, but utility lines along the five-mile route had to be moved or disconnected.) Meanwhile, McDonnell applied for and received a county use permit to "maintain a church" at 2121 Kammerer Avenue.¹³⁹

By late May 1953, everything was in place except the funding. Fortunately, the archbishop's office had submitted a persuasive funding proposal to the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities, a private foundation established in 1945 by John and Helena Raskob. On May 26, Archbishop Mitty wrote to Father McDonnell with news that the foundation had awarded a grant of \$15,000 for "the Mexican Center at San Jose." Given an additional commitment of \$5,000 from St. Patrick's Parish (beyond the \$1,000 commitment for the purchase of the building and another \$800 for Vincent Raney's fees), Mitty was prepared to authorize \$20,000 for relocating and reconstructing the old church building from St. Martin's Parish. In early June, the archbishop's office confirmed Mitty's final approval for the hiring of John Pursley to dismantle the building and move it, build a new foundation, reconstruct the building, stucco and repaint the exterior, lath and plaster the interior, rewire the building, add two restrooms near the entrance, and add one additional exit door. Within a couple of weeks, this work would be underway.¹⁴⁰

When McDonnell began working with Raney and Pursley to plan the relocation and reconstruction of the building, he also sought help from Cesar Chavez. By that point, the two men had developed a strong bond. Chavez and his growing family settled in Sal Si Puedes a little more than a year earlier. Chavez began to assist McDonnell's ministry in and beyond Tremont Hall—and he continued to do so even as he registered thousands

¹³⁸ Donald McDonnell to Monsignor Harold Collins, December 7, 1952, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, AASF; Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edward J. Maher to Most Rev. John J. Mitty, December 14, 1952, St. Patrick's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; Charles P. Hardeman to Rt. Rev. Harold E. Collins, May 25, 1951, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Santa Clara County," AASF.

¹³⁹ Harold E. Collins to Rt. Rev. Edward J. Maher, March 2, 1953, St. Patrick's Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; "Vincent G. Raney," <http://docomomo-noca.org/architects/raney-vincent-g> (accessed May 30, 2016); Vincent G. Raney to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, April 22, 1953, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF; "Request to Rearrange Outside Plant to Permit Moving of Building" (May 11, 1953), McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF; "Santa Clara County Planning Commission Use Permit" (May 22, 1953), McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF.

¹⁴⁰ John J. Mitty to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, May 26, 1953, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF; McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; Leo T. Maher to Rt. Rev. Edward J. Maher, June 5, 1953, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF.

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of new voters and helped Fred Ross launch San Jose's chapter of the Community Service Organization. By the time Chavez turned twenty-six years old in March 1953, he had emerged not only as an advocate for his community but as a leader. Thus when McDonnell negotiated the scope of work necessary for the relocation and reconstruction of the old church building, he asked Chavez to recruit volunteers. Cesar assembled a crew that included himself, his father Librado, his brothers Richard and Lenny, his brother-in-law Joe, and a dozen or more friends and neighbors (likely some of the same men who Chavez recruited to help with the voter registration drive and other CSO activities). As the work proceeded, Cesar's wife Helen, Richard's wife Sally, their mother Juana, their sister Rita, and several other women provided meals, ice water, and encouragement. Cesar had not yet emerged as a community leader when other Mayfair residents launched the campaign for a national parish in the late 1940s, but his role in building Guadalupe Mission Chapel in 1953—and the roles that his family members and other Mayfair residents played—were invaluable. Historian Gina Pitti describes their involvement as “crucial.”¹⁴¹

The work of relocating the building began in June 1953. Richard Chavez, who had started to develop his own talent as a carpenter, later recalled McDonnell's enthusiasm for this phase of the work. The building was “a nice structure,” Richard remembered. “It was a wood structure but it was sound.” The building also was “too long to haul in one piece. So somebody said . . . ‘Well, it's a wood building, Father. If you cut it in half . . . you can move one half and then they can come and move the other half and . . . [then] put them back the way it was.’ And Father . . . said, ‘Okay, okay.’ And he went and bought some hand saws, you know, *hand saws!*” Pursley likely planned to use power tools, but Richard and the other volunteers went to work with the saws McDonnell had purchased. After removing the roof, they “started chopping the building in half. It was an all wood building, so [we said] ‘You guys start that way . . . and we'll start this way,’ and, you know, everybody took about five or ten minutes [sawing by hand] and then somebody else would come and . . . [eventually] we got it cut.” In a narrative report to the archbishop, McDonnell noted that “volunteer workers from the neighborhood of ‘Sal Si Puedes’ removed the roof and stripped the building down to the plate line of the walls.” After the side wings were removed, the rest of the building was cut—not in half but rather into three sections. Pursley and his crew moved these sections to the property on Kammerer Avenue in early July 1953.¹⁴²

Pursley's crew had poured a concrete foundation at the new site. Once the foundation was cured, the building sections were lowered into place, secured together, and secured to the foundation. Dirt was filled in around the foundation and graded. Next, McDonnell's report noted, “new roof rafters were erected and volunteers then put on new sheathing and shingles.” McDonnell held vivid memories of Cesar's work on this new roof. Nearly sixty years later, he still could picture “Cesar with a hammer in his hand, nailing down the roof . . . of the old St. Martin's church, to make it the Guadalupe Center.” McDonnell's report did not mention the reconstruction of the bell tower, but photographs from before and after 1953 show the bell tower rebuilt at a lower height. Plasterers continued the reconstruction work, installing metal lath and then applying several coats of interior plaster on the walls and ceiling as well as scratch and finish coats of exterior stucco on the outside framing. Local plumbers and electricians also played important roles, donating labor and materials necessary to install new wiring, plumbing for a new restroom, and a new heating system. Chavez and other volunteers painted the interior walls and woodwork and the exterior trim. The stained glass windows were re-installed, and professional tilers laid brown and green asphalt tiles. Finally, the altar, altar rail, thirty pews, and other furnishings were moved into place. By early October 1953, the reconstruction was complete.¹⁴³

Margaret Clark, a sociologist who studied East San Jose in the early 1950s, described the newly reconstructed

¹⁴¹ McDonnell, interview; Richard Chavez, interview; Chavez Medina, interview; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 195.

¹⁴² Richard Chavez, interview; McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; Vincent G. Raney to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, July 10, 1953, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF.

¹⁴³ McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; McDonnell, interview; Raney to McDonnell, July 10, 1953.

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building as a stucco structure topped by a squat belfry. “The floor plan is cruciform,” she noted, with “seating for about 250 people. . . . Anterooms include a baptistry and a sacristy which also serves as the church office.” Clark also described some of the interior furnishings, including a large crucifix hanging behind the altar, several statues of saints, a large picture of the Virgen de Guadalupe, and a smaller image of Santo Niño de Atocha (the Child Jesus). Photographs from December 1953 also show the placement of a U.S. flag in the chancel—a clear reflection of the community’s patriotism.¹⁴⁴

Father McDonnell celebrated the first Mass (a Nuptial Mass) in the new building on October 18, 1953, but lay leaders were still in the early stages of planning for the formal dedication and consecration of the building. Here, as with the campaign for a national parish and the formation of the CSO, ethnic Mexican women asserted their leadership, especially those who belonged to the Sociedad Guadalupana. As Gina Pitti explains, the Guadalupanas were “self-appointed conservator[s] of devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe,” but they also assumed responsibility for social services and social events at the parish level. The Sociedad Guadalupana “thrived in Mexican American settlements across the country,” and it “became the single most important religious organization for Spanish-speaking Catholics in the Archdiocese of San Francisco between World War II and 1960.” In East San Jose, the society established a presence at Five Wounds Parish during the late 1940s. When Archbishop Mitty designated the Mayfair district a mission area, the society immediately provided an organizational structure. Among the new members were Juana Chavez (Cesar’s mother), Macaria de la O (who hosted one of Fred Ross’s first house meetings in East San Jose), Maxine Pineda, Angie Sánchez, and Ramona Sariñana. For more than a year, these and other women met in each others’ homes, forming close friendships and a broader support network that “extended beyond the church walls.” Still, they looked forward to moving their meetings to the mission chapel, and their presence, Pitti notes, “no doubt helped root the new chapel in the neighborhood and contributed to its success.” McDonnell oversaw the plans for the dedication and consecration of the new building, but Ramona Sariñana and her fellow Guadalupanas took charge of the details.¹⁴⁵

Although the reconstruction work was completed by early October, the Guadalupanas proposed to delay the dedication and consecration until Sunday, December 13, 1953, the day after the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. McDonnell had long since decided the building should be dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and this was perhaps an obvious choice. The story that the Virgin Mary—with dark skin, speaking Nahuatl—visited a newly converted Indian, Juan Diego, in 1531 near Villa de Guadalupe spread slowly until the first written accounts of the visitation were published in the 1640s. When the forces fighting for Mexican independence embraced the image of the Virgin during the 1810s, she started to become a powerful symbol not only of Mexican Catholic spirituality but also Mexican national identity. Her particular appeal to women, the indigenous, the marginalized, and others in need of protection continued to grow during the nineteenth century. That appeal remained strong among Mexican immigrant communities in the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century—and, as McDonnell saw, Mexican Catholics in East San Jose maintained their devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe in the early 1950s. But even an obvious choice for McDonnell was still a choice. Thus playwright and film director Luis Valdez (whose family moved to East San Jose in 1953) has given great credit to McDonnell for recognizing that dedicating the chapel to the Virgin of Guadalupe would help make it a beacon, a refuge, and a source of strength, “not just in our community, but in . . . ourselves.” It took “a very perceptive priest . . . to appreciate that.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Clark, *Health*, 99-100; photographs dated December 13, 1953, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder “Guadalupe Center, San Jose,” AASF.

¹⁴⁵ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 195, 207, 213, 216; Anthony Soto, “Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, San Jose, California” (1964), copy in parish scrapbook, OLGP; “Tentative Program for Solemn Dedication of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 13, 1953” (n.d.), 1, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF.

¹⁴⁶ Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), passim; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 209; Valdez, interview.

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Ramona Sariñana and her fellow Guadalupanas organized a jamaica (a festival with food and entertainment) to follow the dedication and consecration of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel, and they secured permission from the city to close Kammerer Avenue between Sunset Avenue and Jackson Avenue for that purpose. The Guadalupanas also wanted to organize a liturgical procession from Tremont Hall to the chapel to open the Solemn Mass that morning, but the archbishop's office expressed reservations. Accustomed to the need for negotiation, they countered with the idea of "a simple 'walk' of the people from the old hall to the new church, without any participation by clergy or Mass-servers." This idea was fitting. The walk would symbolize their long-awaited move from Tremont Hall to a new spiritual home, but it also would express their identification and unity as the ethnic Mexican laity of East San Jose. With nearly one thousand community members participating, the walk began with younger girls and boys in front, then older girls and boys, women, the Guadalupanas, men, and finally members of the choir. From the old hall near the corner of Tremont Street and Jackson Avenue, they proceeded north on Jackson, then west on East San Antonio Street, south on King Road, and back east on Kammerer Avenue to the chapel. After St. Patrick's pastor, Monsignor Edward Maher, blessed the chapel on behalf of Archbishop Mitty, Father McDonnell celebrated the Mass.¹⁴⁷

During the closing months of 1953, McDonnell called the new building the "Center of Our Lady of Guadalupe." He also referred to it as a "multi-purpose building" and a "multi-purpose center." Writing to the archbishop, a seminarian working as McDonnell's assistant referred to "the new chapel building" and called it the "Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe." The Guadalupanas referred to it simply, but consistently, as "the church." That these and other members of East San Jose's ethnic Mexican laity thought of the building as a church was telling. For several decades they had waited patiently—and for several years they fought actively—for "a church of their own." As 1953 drew to a close, they finally had a building that would function like a church. They would continue to push for national parish status, but in the short term, the official classification of their new building as a mission chapel (rather than a parish church) was not a concern.¹⁴⁸

The appearance of the building was not an overriding concern, either. McDonnell's fortuitous acquisition of a former church building gave the laity a chapel with a bell tower, stained glass windows, and other modest ornamentation. Cesar Chavez and the other men who helped relocate and reconstruct the building certainly took pride in their workmanship, but the building gained no additional significance because it had a bell tower, a cruciform floor plan, or any other specific characteristics that might have been associated with churches in the 1950s. Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel gained significance because of the struggle it symbolized and, even more so, because of the functions it served.

The Function and National Historical Significance of Guadalupe Mission Chapel, 1953-1958

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel gained national historical significance during the 1950s because it existed as a symbol of struggle, perseverance, and victory and because it functioned as both a parish church and a multipurpose center. The building's symbolism and its dual function reflected the convergence of three developments rooted in early twentieth-century U.S. history: the agricultural industry's growing reliance on ethnic Mexican migrant farm labor, the Catholic Church's growing recognition of its obligation to minister to ethnic Mexicans, and the growing influence of the Mexican American civil rights movement. In the short term,

¹⁴⁷ Thomas J. Bove to Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, October 9, 1953, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF; Robert J. Stowe to Chancery Office, October 6, 1953, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Santa Clara County," AASF; "Tentative Program for Solemn Dedication"; "Church Units Dedicated," *San Jose Mercury News*, December 14, 1953, p. 1, clipping in Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Guadalupe Center, San Jose," AASF.

¹⁴⁸ McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; Stowe to Chancery Office; "Tentative Program for Solemn Dedication."

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the building's dual function as a church and a multipurpose center created a dynamic space that shaped Chavez's sense of servanthood, spurred his emergence as a community organizer and civil rights leader, and inspired his work as one of the nation's preeminent labor rights leaders. In the long term, this space—and Chavez's ongoing ties to it—connected the Mexican American civil rights movement, the American Catholic Church, and the farmworker movement that Chavez was preparing to lead.

An understanding of the significance of Guadalupe Mission Chapel starts with the simple fact that, at the end of 1953, the chapel existed. Large numbers of Mexican immigrants had begun to arrive in Santa Clara County more than three decades prior. Most of them continued to work in agriculture on a seasonal basis, but they settled in East San Jose because they wanted to build homes, sink roots, and raise their children. Most of them also wanted to practice their faith at a nearby Catholic church, but local clergy could only direct them to St. Patrick's Church, three miles west in downtown San Jose. They watched as several Protestant denominations established new churches in the Eastside barrios—two or three during the 1920s and eight more during the 1930s—but U.S. entry into World War II finally brought the promise of change. Recognizing a need to better serve ethnic Mexicans and thus support wartime unity, Catholic officials formed the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking. Ethnic Mexican members of the laity took action as well. In East San Jose, they recruited a Spanish-speaking priest and secured a space to worship, but their desire for "a church of their own" began to grow. Across the region, Mexican American civil rights activists made broader demands, and Mexican Americans in East San Jose took up these demands in the early 1950s. By 1953, activism within and beyond the Church had become mutually reinforcing. While Chavez helped launch the local CSO chapter in summer 1952, for example, Father McDonnell worked to acquire the former church building from St. Martin's Parish. Shortly after the CSO concluded its voter registration drive in fall 1952, the Mayfair Packing Company saw the value in donating an acre of land to house the building. As Chavez opened the CSO's first service center in winter 1953, McDonnell developed plans for the building's relocation and reconstruction, doing so with Chavez and other volunteers in mind. In short, Catholic activism and civil rights activism intertwined in East San Jose the early 1950s. The mission chapel was a tangible product of that activism.

Given this context, the community's pride in Guadalupe Mission Chapel is not surprising. In the first few months after the dedication and consecration of the building, McDonnell noted that the "immediate result of the building of the Center of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been a great spirit of pride and enthusiasm on the part of the East-Side Spanish-speaking community." Decades of patience, years of struggle, and months of volunteer labor had fueled a strong sense of attachment to the building. As historian Gina Pitti observes, the "experience of helping establish a local chapel invested [Eastside Catholics] . . . with a sense of ownership." Luis Valdez remembered the same sentiment. When the Valdez family moved from Delano to East San Jose, they searched for a Catholic church where they would be welcomed. "Even though St. Mary's [in Delano] was a cute little church, it didn't really belong to the Mexicans," Valdez explained. "It belonged to the growers. It was their church. And when we came to San Jose, I mean, I saw St. Joseph's Basilica, but that wasn't for Mexicans. Five Wounds, that was Portuguese." He saw that Guadalupe Mission Chapel was different. "This is our home," he remembered thinking. "This is our religious home."¹⁴⁹

Guadalupe Mission Chapel also was a symbol—and thus a constant reminder—of the struggle, perseverance, and victory that produced it. Surveying the effort that led to the relocation and reconstruction of the building, Pitti concludes that the chapel "physically embodied residents' aspirations and their struggle to carve out a space of their own in the Church." The chapel symbolized ethnic Mexicans' "rightful place in the Church." Eastside Catholics still wanted a parish church, but they embraced the mission chapel as nothing less than a victory in their ongoing struggle for better treatment. For Pitti, the building was a testament to "local residents'

¹⁴⁹ McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 197; Valdez, interview.

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fervent interest in having a chapel in their neighborhood, even if it was not an official national parish [church].” At the same time, the compromise that produced the chapel offered something valuable to Archbishop Mitty and other Church officials concerned by Protestant inroads—it offered symbolic reassurance of “Catholicism’s centrality to the Spanish-speaking community.” It was an indelible reminder, for laity and clergy alike, “that Mexican-origin Catholics were part of the Body of Christ.”¹⁵⁰

Guadalupe Mission Chapel gained even more significance because it functioned as both a parish church and a multipurpose center. The former function included Sunday Masses that featured Spanish translations of Latin passages as well as Father McDonnell’s Spanish-language sermons. McDonnell began celebrating two Sunday Masses in December 1953, added a third in 1954, and then added a fourth at the beginning of 1955. The chapel’s seating capacity was 250, and McDonnell noted in 1954 that Mexican faithful “filled the building” for every Mass. A year later, sociologist Margaret Clark estimated that the average attendance at each of the four Masses was 175, meaning roughly 700 Catholics attended services at the mission chapel every week. On Holy Days of Obligation, Mexican Catholics from throughout the South Bay Area pushed this number to 1,200 or more. Thus, Gina Pitti concludes, Guadalupe Mission “served as the archdiocese’s unofficial center of Mexican religious life” during the mid 1950s. More than any parish in the area, the mission “functioned as a *de facto* national parish” for Mexican Catholics. Pitti identifies Guadalupe Mission Chapel as the “Mexican Catholic hub” for the Santa Clara Valley. Indeed, the building offered a space where Mexican Catholics from the Mayfair district and beyond could worship alongside their neighbors, honor their own religious traditions, and truly participate in the life of a religious community—by taking up committee work, offering religious instruction, serving others, and socializing. The building offered virtually all of the ingredients that Eastside Catholics identified in 1950 when they asked Archbishop Mitty for “a church of their own.”¹⁵¹

These and other parish church functions were anchored within the mission chapel itself, but it would be wrong to think these functions were entirely contained by the building’s walls. The building was a true hub of activity. Many of its functions spilled out into the community on a weekly or even daily basis, continually drawing the laity in and sending the Church’s influence out. As Margaret Clark observed, most of these functions appealed to women more than men. Clark estimated that 40 percent of Eastside Catholics attended Mass every week and these were “mainly women, older men, and young children.” A woman named Paula, for example, “attends church at the Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe . . . and is a member of its Altar Society, the Sociedad Guadalupana.” Clark reported that Paula “likes working for the Altar Society, helping cook Mexican delicacies for the Sunday food sales at the church [and] taking part in the jamaicas. . . . She has made many friends among the other women of the Sociedad, and often visits with them in their homes to discuss the affairs of the church.” Paula’s husband was Catholic, but like other Mexican American men, he was less likely to attend Mass every week. McDonnell and his fellow priests in the Spanish Mission Band often discussed how they might connect with men like Paula’s husband more effectively. After some deliberation in 1954 they decided to permit the *velorio*, a funerary custom that compelled ethnic Mexican men to stand watch over a body throughout the night before a funeral Mass. The priests thought the practice would provide “a unique opportunity for reaching people, especially men,” and to “instruct them in the meaning of death, Redemption, the Commandments, and the Mass.”¹⁵²

Using the same rationale, Father McDonnell decided to permit and preside over the *Vía Crucis*, a traditional Mexican celebration of the fourteen Stations of the Cross. Beginning in 1954 and continuing for years to come, hundreds of Mexican faithful assembled at Guadalupe Mission Chapel on the evening of Good Friday and lit

¹⁵⁰ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 196-97.

¹⁵¹ “Report for 1954,” McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF; McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; Clark, *Health*, 99-100; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 198.

¹⁵² Clark, *Health*, 110, 28; Spanish Mission Band priests quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 124.

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candles distributed by the Guadalupanas. McDonnell then led a solemn procession through the streets of the Mayfair district. Twenty men or more carrying a heavy, wooden cross constructed from an old telephone pole (roughly twenty-five feet long with an eight foot crosspiece) followed McDonnell. Thirteen men carrying smaller, four foot long crosses followed in turn, and the Guadalupanas, torchbearers, and the rest of the faithful gradually joined the procession. They would stop fourteen times, saying prayers and planting a cross each time, until the last cross was lifted and planted in a large mound of dirt in an empty field near the chapel, representing Calvary. Historian Gina Pitti points to this procession as an example of Guadalupe Mission activities that “moved the expression of faith outside of church walls” and ultimately “claimed the entire working-class neighborhood as a sacred space.” As McDonnell had anticipated, the mission chapel came to serve as a wellspring for the Church’s presence throughout the Mayfair district. Processions such as the Vía Crucis embodied the specific connections between the chapel’s church-like functions and the life of the community beyond its walls.¹⁵³

Guadalupe Mission Chapel was the starting point and ending point for the Vía Crucis and other public processions. The chapel likewise functioned as the starting point and ending point for many of the weekly responsibilities that McDonnell assumed as pastor in residence—responsibilities that took him from the chapel to numerous places throughout the Santa Clara Valley. It is important to note that the mission chapel did not have a rectory in the mid 1950s. McDonnell had access to the rectory for St. Patrick’s Parish, but in many ways the chapel itself functioned as his home. He often slept in the chapel, and he often skipped meals or improvised. (John Duggan noted that when McDonnell ate, he ate well, “but meals were seldom a part of his regular day,” and “when he slept, he slept well, but sleep only came when he was physically exhausted; often he went to sleep on his feet.”) Still, McDonnell delivered his radio program, “Cristo Rey,” every weekday morning without fail. Every Thursday evening, he made his way from the chapel to the Santa Clara County Jail, where he ministered to men who were incarcerated. One or two nights a week, he celebrated Mass in one of the scores of labor camps in the Santa Clara Valley, often staying late to hear confessions and returning to the chapel after midnight. Every Sunday morning, he celebrated Mass at the chapel. The remainder of every day, he engaged in other forms of ministerial work at the chapel, in nearby homes, and elsewhere in Santa Clara County and beyond.¹⁵⁴

Father McDonnell authorized other uses that were less strictly related to the traditional functions of a mission chapel (or a parish church), and when he made the chapel available to other entities, he affirmed the building’s broader function as a multipurpose center. Of course, McDonnell originally conceived of the “Center of Our Lady of Guadalupe” as a building that would house multiple functions. Some of these functions were associated with Tremont Hall, and McDonnell simply transferred them to the mission chapel. As McDonnell recalled, the chapel “was set up with the altar and everything” at the beginning of 1954, “and then for other activities . . . we pulled curtains to cover the altar, and then it’s just a hall.” Herman Gallegos also remembered the “huge red curtains” that a theater owner had donated. They were installed above the altar rail and McDonnell was able to pull them together, hiding the chancel from the nave. In his report on the building’s reconstruction, McDonnell mentioned that “retractable partitioning was hung to divide the chapel from the hall.” Contemporary photographs show no evidence of curtain rods or other “retractable partitioning,” but McDonnell likely was referring to these curtains. He also noted that “the hall section at the present time is used for religious instruction of the children, for adult classes, and for the meetings of the various societies. Likewise it provides a place for youth activities and gatherings.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Clark, *Health*, 104; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 255; Alvarez, interview.

¹⁵⁴ Gallegos, interview, 2012; Duggan, “My Mind,” 25; “Report for 1954,” McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, AASF; Assistant Chancellor John P. Connolly to Reverend Donald McDonnell, February 5, 1954, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 26, AASF; Archbishop John J. Mitty to Rev. Donald McDonnell, May 21, 1955, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 26, AASF.

¹⁵⁵ McDonnell, interview; Gallegos, interview, 2012; McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center.

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These functions—religious instruction, meetings, and youth activities—had been associated with Tremont Hall, but Guadalupe Mission Chapel gave them more space to grow. When McDonnell and Gallegos organized the “Eastside Youth Center” in November 1953, for example, they held their meetings at Tremont Hall. Still just twenty-three years old, Gallegos was serving as president of San Jose’s CSO chapter, and he had just started working for the Santa Clara County Juvenile Probation Department. The Eastside Youth Center sponsored picnics and other daytime outings, but Gallegos quickly learned that younger men and women preferred nighttime events with music and dancing. The chapel gave them a new meeting space on Thursday evenings. It also allowed McDonnell and Gallegos to launch “Club Sh-Boom,” whose members pulled the curtains, moved the pews, and hosted Saturday evening dances in the chapel building (until the Guadalupanas complained about the lingering smell of cigarette smoke on Sunday mornings).¹⁵⁶

In a similar vein, but perhaps closer in spirit to the burial society that Father McDonnell and Cesar Chavez had organized in 1952, McDonnell encouraged a few families to launch a credit union in March 1954. The original members raised \$500, chartered the Santa Maria Federal Credit Union, elected officers, and convened meetings at Guadalupe Mission Chapel. One of the founding members told sociologist Margaret Clark that the credit union grew slowly because people did not understand how it worked, but “after the priest explained about it in church a few times, people began to join.” The chapel thus provided not only a meeting space for the members of the credit union but also an obvious point of contact for potential new members—even during Mass. By the end of 1955, the credit union counted one hundred members, and it had issued more than seventy-five loans, mostly for down payments on homes in the Mayfair district. The credit union was not affiliated with the Catholic Church, but the chapel building was its home.¹⁵⁷

Guadalupe Mission Chapel also became the new home of Alicia Hernández’s well-baby clinic. Like Gallegos, Hernández remained an active leader of San Jose’s CSO chapter in 1954, and she continued to work closely with Chavez and Ross. It was a simple matter to relocate her weekly clinic from Tremont Hall to the chapel, and McDonnell noted in his report on the building’s reconstruction that nurses from the Santa Clara County Public Health Department had begun using the chapel “for their well-baby conference and clinic services to the pre-school children of the area.” As with the credit union, McDonnell bore no direct responsibility for this function, but the function certainly fit his vision for a multipurpose center. Historian Gina Pitti explains that McDonnell and his fellow priests in the Spanish Mission Band emphasized the role that ethnic Mexican women played in strengthening the faith of their families and communities. Their reports to Archbishop Mitty—and Mitty’s responses—encouraged “initiatives that supported women in their family roles. The Spanish Mission Band envisioned maternity clinics and child-care centers, while parish centers established religious education and English courses as well as classes in the domestic arts, including home improvement, canning and preserving, and needlework. These programs served a variety of practical and pastoral goals, including doctrinal instruction, Americanization, social welfare assistance, and the reinforcement of gender and family roles.” In other words, functions such as the well-baby clinic might not have been strictly sacramental in nature, but McDonnell thought they served a religious purpose and thus had their place in the chapel building.¹⁵⁸

The same thinking fueled Father McDonnell’s eagerness to see the CSO make use of the mission chapel. McDonnell continued to be an important supporter of the CSO in the mid 1950s, as did his colleagues in the Spanish Mission Band and other allied priests who would help Ross and Chavez organize new chapters in the years to come. As John Duggan has pointed out, even though “it would be an exaggeration to say that the Band was the reason for the success of the CSO . . . it would be hard to explain the history and development of the

¹⁵⁶ Gallegos, interview, 2012; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 115.

¹⁵⁷ Clark, *Health*, 93.

¹⁵⁸ McDonnell, untitled report on construction of Guadalupe Center; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 128.

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CSO without the Band.” With McDonnell’s support, the San Jose chapter had grown to include 439 dues-paying members at the beginning of 1954. Under the leadership of young Mexican American members of the laity, the chapter was doing work in the community that McDonnell wanted done, and he was committed to their cause. He had made Tremont Hall available to the CSO. He did so with the chapel as well. Members of the chapter convened meetings in the building, often with McDonnell on hand to offer an invocation. Cesar’s sister, Rita Chavez Medina, recalled that the CSO also sponsored various events at the chapel, including Christmas programs where CSO members distributed toys, clothing, and other items. To some extent, the CSO became a regular presence at the chapel. Chavez Medina noted that CSO members set up tables “right in front” of the chapel so they could talk with people before and after Mass about CSO activities. And as he did with the credit union, clinic, and other functions, McDonnell promoted the work of the CSO. To be sure, members of the chapter also convened meetings at the local elementary school and established a presence at the service center on East Santa Clara Street, but Guadalupe Mission Chapel became the CSO’s home in East San Jose.¹⁵⁹

Guadalupe Mission Chapel thus functioned as a parish church and a multipurpose center during the mid 1950s. In 1958, five years after Archbishop Mitty approved the relocation and reconstruction of the building, McDonnell reviewed these functions and assessed their impact. In a report to Mitty, McDonnell noted that the liturgical life of the mission was strong. Attendance at the four Sunday Masses had grown to 1,200 (meaning around 50 people stood through each Mass). The chapel had hosted nearly 1,800 baptisms, more than 1,000 First Communions, and more than 300 marriages, each preceded by religious instruction and preparation. McDonnell praised the particular impact of the *velorio*, which made it possible for him to talk with men “at a time when they are most receptive to hearing the eternal truths of life, death, redemption, salvation, forgiveness, sacrifice and communion.” As part of his own tireless work, McDonnell had broadcast 1,140 *Cristo Rey* programs. He also reported that the chapel had “served as the base for teams of priests, seminarians, and lay workers” who routinely visited “the 59 major field labor camps” that counted hundreds of families and “4,500 Mexican nationals” among their residents. McDonnell did not report that the dances sponsored by Club Sh-Boom had moved back to Tremont Hall (before ending due to lack of interest), but he noted that other youth groups “continued to be active” at the chapel. He reported that the credit union had 95 members and a working capital of \$5,200 and that the chapel was used as a health clinic every Monday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., serving an average of 50 families every week. Finally, he noted that it had been the privilege of the chapel staff “to work with the Community Service Organization in training the Spanish speaking people in civic responsibility by voter registration, citizenship classes and English classes.”¹⁶⁰

Because Guadalupe Mission Chapel functioned as a parish church and a multipurpose center, it created a dynamic space that fueled Cesar Chavez’s emergence not only as a servant and community organizer but ultimately as one of the nation’s preeminent civil rights and labor rights leaders. That emergence began in summer 1952 with Chavez’s work on the voter registration campaign and his election as vice president of San Jose’s new CSO chapter. It continued in summer 1953 with his recruitment of a volunteer crew to help relocate and reconstruct the chapel building itself. Over the next five years—culminating with his departure from San Jose in September 1958—Chavez spent a significant amount of time working with and learning from Fred Ross and Father McDonnell. He also spent time working with Herman Gallegos (whose own stature was growing around the state and beyond); he began to cross paths with other civil rights and labor rights leaders such as Edward Roybal, Ernesto Galarza, and Saul Alinsky; and he began to build a personal network that included

¹⁵⁹ Duggan, “My Mind,” 24; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 151-52; Chavez Medina, interview; Gallegos, interview, 2012; McDonnell, interview; “Santa Clara County Chapter Report” (1956), Fred Ross Papers, M0181, Box 6, Folder 6, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California (hereafter SUL).

¹⁶⁰ Donald McDonnell, “1958 Report on Guadalupe Center, San Jose, California” (n.d.), Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder “Guadalupe Center, San Jose,” AASF. On the fate of Club Sh-Boom see Gallegos, interview, 2012; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,” 115.

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Dolores Huerta, Gilbert Padilla, and other future leaders, members, and supporters of the “Farm Worker Association” he would launch in 1962. Certainly, Chavez spent much time away from East San Jose over the course of these five years, but he continued to think of Sal Si Puedes as his home and Guadalupe Mission Chapel as his church. The mission chapel, in fact, became the place most closely associated with his emergence and his early leadership.

By the time the mission chapel was dedicated and consecrated in December 1953, Fred Ross was back on the Industrial Areas Foundation’s payroll. As historian Kenneth Burt has explained, the success of the CSO in San Jose convinced Saul Alinsky to raise the funds necessary to re-hire Ross in August 1953. Ross secured short-term funding to hire Chavez as an assistant, but Alinsky soon added him to the foundation’s payroll as well. While Ross organized in Salinas, Fresno, and San Bernardino, Chavez stayed in San Jose, supported a CSO chapter Ross had organized in Union City, and then began to organize a new chapter in Oakland—his first. Ross and Chavez brought CSO members together near Monterey to formally launch the CSO as a national organization in March 1954. The members elected officers, established legislative priorities, and began to work on a constitution. Four months later, with the Oakland chapter firmly established, Ross asked Chavez to relocate (with his wife and five children) to the Central Valley. Chavez would spend the next fourteen months organizing chapters in Madera, Bakersfield, and Hanford. He had learned much from working alongside Ross and assisting McDonnell in San Jose and beyond, but he embraced this opportunity to work independently, hone his skills as an organizer, and develop his own style and reputation as leader—quiet yet charismatic, compassionate, determined, and tireless. Ross asked him to return to San Jose in September 1955. The local chapter needed assistance, but Alinsky also wanted Ross and Chavez to stop organizing new chapters and focus instead on moving the entire organization toward financial independence. Chavez would continue to travel frequently, but he and his growing family lived in San Jose until their final departure in September 1958.¹⁶¹

Before he left for the Central Valley in July 1954, Chavez’s daily life revolved around his work for the CSO, his friendship with Father McDonnell, and his family. When he returned to San Jose, he prioritized the CSO even more, but he continued to spend a significant amount of time with McDonnell. The priest had been ministering to workers in labor camps since 1950. He and his colleagues in the Spanish Mission Band would arrive in different camps in the evening, gather the faithful for prayers and confessions, stay in the camps, and celebrate Masses early the next morning before the workday began. In July 1953, McDonnell requested and received special permission from the archbishop to celebrate evening Masses on Sundays in the camps (and, a year later, on Fridays at the mission chapel), when migrant workers were more likely to attend. In February 1954, McDonnell likewise secured permission to celebrate evening Masses on Thursdays in the Santa Clara County Jail. Celebrating Masses in such places “was considered a radical thing to do,” historian Jeffrey Burns explains, but it reflected McDonnell’s “unorthodox manner of ministering to the people” and “his identification with them.” And Chavez often assisted him—at the chapel, in the camps, and at the county jail. “I began going to the bracero camps . . . [and to the] jail with him, anything to be with him,” Chavez recalled. Herman Gallegos often joined them. He remembered long conversations in the chapel, in McDonnell’s Jeep, and elsewhere. “I remember many, many a night when Cesar and I would [be] . . . with Father McDonnell.” They would leave from the chapel, and when they returned they would continue to “sit in his little truck . . . [and talk] about the encyclicals [and] . . . the right of people to organize.” Gallegos also recalled conversations outside the chapel when McDonnell would illustrate his points by drawing in the dirt with a stick, like a teacher using a chalkboard. The chapel building “didn’t have a sidewalk around it,” Gallegos noted, “but there was dirt to draw on. It was the lesson that was being taught, not the landscape that impressed us.” For Gallegos, these conversations, CSO meetings, and other functions made the mission chapel not only a parish church and a

¹⁶¹ Pawel, *Crusades*, 36-39, 48-49; Burt, *Search* 139, 147-48; Fred Ross to Cesar Chavez, March 2, 1954, UFW Office of the President Cesar Chavez Collection, Part 1, Box 2, Folder “CSO, 1954-55,” ALUA, WSU; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 114; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 152; Finks, *Radical Vision*, 62, 65.

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multipurpose center but something more: a school for democracy. “There in this little hall . . . we learned to promote responsibility,” he emphasized. “We learned about the freedom to immigrate and integrate. . . . We learned the importance of public affairs, of civic participation. These are democratic values.”¹⁶²

Just as Chavez assisted McDonnell, the priest continued to support Chavez, particularly when he rebuilt San Jose’s CSO chapter in 1956. When Gallegos completed his term as president and Chavez left for the Central Valley, the chapter claimed around 400 members. Under new leadership, the chapter struggled with disagreements over priorities, dwindling funds, and waning enthusiasm, and membership dropped below 100. When Chavez returned, he focused on rebuilding the chapter. He also sought to develop revenue streams so the chapter could hire its own organizer, freeing him to move on. With the sense of determination that helped define his leadership style, Chavez spent much of the following year establishing a rummage store, planning a three-day carnival, and managing a Christmas tree lot. These efforts took time and energy, more than chapter members could commit, so Chavez relied on family and friends, including McDonnell and Ross. When he needed help driving volunteers to the rummage store, for example, he turned to his brother Lenny. When he needed to find supplies for the carnival, he received help from McDonnell and Ross. When he set up the Christmas tree lot, McDonnell blessed the trees, took two to the chapel, and returned to keep Chavez company. “On a cold December night,” McDonnell recalled, “I went out to find Cesar by himself there in the Christmas tree lot.” McDonnell was not surprised. Chavez “was that kind of a guy.”¹⁶³

By 1957, the chapter’s membership surpassed 300, and the chapter had enough money to hire an organizer. Chavez began to travel again—driving thousands of miles each week—but he returned to San Jose almost every weekend to spend time with his family, attend Mass, talk with McDonnell, and support the chapter (and his sister Rita, the new chapter president). Now thirty years old, Chavez was recognized as a leader of the CSO. He was building the network that would help him organize farmworkers in the 1960s. Perhaps most important, he was weaving together the ideas and influences that defined his life not only as a servant and a community organizer but as a civil rights and labor rights leader. He started with the recognition he shared with McDonnell that the Catholic faith was an activist faith, one that called upon its adherents to fight for social justice. Then he added the recognition he shared with Ross that the marginalized could gain power through organization, and they could use this power to secure their rights. Finally, he added his own recognition that a commitment to servanthood created a source of strength and self-confidence.¹⁶⁴

Connecting the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement, the Catholic Church, and the Farmworker Movement

This weaving of ideas and influences mirrored—and propelled—a larger process playing out across the region during the 1950s: an intertwining of the Mexican American civil rights movement, Catholic efforts to minister to ethnic Mexicans, and ongoing efforts to organize farmworkers. Like Chavez’s own emergence as a community organizer and civil rights leader, this process was tied to Guadalupe Mission Chapel. Indeed, the chapel gained a final degree of national historical significance because it began to connect the Mexican American civil rights movement, the American Catholic Church, and the farmworker movement that Chavez himself was preparing to lead.

¹⁶² Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 295; Fr. Donald McDonnell to Most Rev. John J. Mitty, July 29, 1953, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder “Santa Clara County,” AASF; Fr. Donald McDonnell to Most Reverend John J. Mitty, June 23, 1954, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 26, AASF; John J. Mitty to Rev. Donald McDonnell, June 25, 1954, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 26, AASF; John P. Connolly to Reverend Donald McDonnell, February 5, 1954, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 26, AASF; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 216; McDonnell, interview; Gallegos, interview, 2012. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 91.

¹⁶³ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 123-24; Pawel, *Crusades*, 41-44; McDonnell, interview.

¹⁶⁴ Pawel, *Crusades*, 47, 49; “Santa Clara County Chapter Report” (1956), Fred Ross Papers, M0181, Box 6, Folder 6, SUL.

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During the early 1950s, the CSO was the ascendant organization within the Mexican American civil rights movement. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA) remained influential, but their locations on the right and left of the political spectrum limited their reach. The CSO occupied the middle ground, effectively combining LULAC's anti-Communism with ANMA's embrace of Mexican immigrants. The CSO's focus on citizenship was the common denominator—linking support for immigration to support for naturalization, civic duty, and American patriotism. “What makes a nation indivisible?” a CSO pamphlet asked. “What generates this goal of unity . . . that holds the people of a country steadfast?” The simple answer: “Citizenship.” The CSO thus invested in English classes, citizenship classes, and voter registration drives. In 1955, for example, the CSO enrolled 125 immigrants in citizenship classes in Madera, 150 in Fresno, 200 in Salinas, 235 in Brawley, 250 in Bakersfield, and 650 in San Bernardino. In 1956, Santa Clara County Supervisor Ed Levin praised San Jose's CSO chapter for helping nearly 1,000 immigrants become U.S. citizens. By 1960, the total number of Mexican immigrants assisted through the naturalization process surpassed 40,000, and the total number of new voter registrations surpassed 225,000. In San Jose and other cities, these voters pushed for improvements such as paved roads, sidewalks, streetlights, and sewers. At the state level, the CSO fought for old-age pensions for long-term resident non-citizens and lent support to other causes, including the NAACP's campaign for fair employment legislation and the Japanese American Citizens League's efforts to repeal California's anti-Asian Alien Land Law. At the national level, historian David Gutiérrez notes, the CSO “broke new ground in the area of immigration politics” with its opposition to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and, two years later, its denunciation of Operation Wetback—both of which LULAC and the G.I. Forum supported.¹⁶⁵

As historian Kenneth Burt concludes, the CSO distinguished itself from LULAC and the G.I. Forum through its “outreach to non-citizens.” The CSO likewise distinguished itself from ANMA—and solidified its own influence on the Mexican American civil rights movement—by distancing itself from Communism and by aligning itself with the Catholic Church. The CSO inherited the relationship with the Church that Saul Alinsky had forged during the early 1940s. The relationship grew stronger with the appointment of Catholic officials such as Monsignor Thomas O'Dwyer to the CSO's advisory committee but also with the support that Archbishop John Mitty and the Spanish Mission Band provided throughout Northern California. This support proved crucial when CSO members faced “red-baiting.” As Chavez worked on the first voter registration drive in San Jose in 1952, for example, rumors that he was a Communist began to circulate. Fred Ross had faced the same allegations in Orange County in 1946 (and suspicions resurfaced in Los Angeles in 1947), but after Senator Joseph McCarthy began capturing headlines in 1950, fears of Communism grew much stronger. The Church's visible support for the CSO offered an antidote. As Herman Gallegos recalled, Ross scheduled CSO meetings with Father McDonnell's availability in mind. “The Catholic Church had such an anti-Communitic presence,” Gallegos explained, “that just having Father McDonnell there [was] . . . very, very helpful.” With this in mind, Chavez met with McDonnell at Guadalupe Mission Chapel before leaving for the Central Valley and asked him for a letter of introduction addressed to his fellow priests. McDonnell did not hesitate. The CSO “has done great work in educating our Mexican-American community in civic responsibility and in taking the initiative in the solution of their problems,” he wrote. “Mr. Chavez was one of the very first to take part in this work. . . . I have always found him [to be] a man of sound principles, clear thinking, complete integrity and loyalty. I would greatly appreciate all the help and guidance you can give him in his work.” This letter—and the close relationship between the CSO and the Catholic Church that it reflected—help pave the way for Chavez's emergence as a community organizer and civil rights leader during the 1950s.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 169-70; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 162, 168-69; Pawel, *Crusades*, 38; Ed Levin letter (n.d.), UFW Office of the President Cesar Chavez Collection, Part 1, Box 2, Folder 3, ALUA, WSU; Finks, *Radical Vision*, 65; Brilliant, *Color of America*, 132-38; and Burt, *Search*, 140, 181. CSO pamphlet quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 169.

¹⁶⁶ Burt, *Search*, 139-40; Gallegos, interview, 2012; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 107; Fr. Donald McDonnell letter, June 21, 1954, UFW

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More broadly, McDonnell's letter reflected the evolving relationship between the Catholic Church and the Mexican American civil rights movement. At the time McDonnell wrote the letter, he and his fellow priests in the Spanish Mission Band were calling upon Church officials to invest in this relationship. By the mid 1950s all four priests had established their bases of operation—McDonnell in San Jose, Thomas McCullough in Stockton, John García in Berkeley, and John Duggan in Union City. They opened community centers, visited labor camps, ministered to ethnic Mexicans, and supported the development of lay leaders. Yet their efforts to bring Mexican Catholics back to the Church were falling short. They estimated that only 25,000 of 122,000 ethnic Mexicans in their five largest counties attended Mass regularly—a “good beginning” that left “much yet to do.” At the same time, these priests were becoming a dynamic force within the Church. McDonnell, for example, became involved with the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC). As a regional officer of the NCRLC, McDonnell began to work with Church leaders such as Father James Vizzard (head of the NCRLC's office in Washington, D.C.), Archbishop Robert Lucey (chair of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking), and Monsignor George Higgins (director of the National Catholic Welfare Conference's Social Action Department). Vizzard was particularly impressed with McDonnell. He began to arrange for McDonnell to testify before Congressional committees on matters related to rural life and agricultural labor, and he often asked McDonnell to share his insights with the Catholic press (which reached millions of readers). McDonnell and his colleagues developed a clear message: in order to serve the spiritual needs of ethnic Mexicans, the Church must address their social and material needs. This meant standing up to employers and speaking out to lawmakers. It also meant protecting braceros but ultimately opposing the Bracero Program and supporting efforts to organize farmworkers. In short, it meant fighting on behalf of civil rights and labor rights.¹⁶⁷

Support for the ascendant organization within the Mexican American civil rights movement—the CSO—thus made sense to the Spanish Mission Band priests. Much of their own direct support came at the local level, especially in the cities where they had established a strong presence. In Stockton, for example, Father McCullough was working out of St. Mary's Church on East Washington Street when Fred Ross arrived in 1955 with plans to organize a CSO chapter. As McDonnell had done in East San Jose, McCullough made introductions, helped set up house meetings, and encouraged the work of the new chapter. (One of Ross's early connections in Stockton was Dolores Huerta, a twenty-five-year-old parishioner at St. Mary's Church. Ross saw that she understood “the urgency of action on civil rights issues.” Huerta later explained: “I always hated injustice and I always wanted to do something to change things. Fred opened a door for me. He changed my whole life.”) At the regional level, the Spanish Mission Band priests used their connections to Archbishop Lucey to cultivate support for the CSO from the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking (BCSS). In the early 1950s, the CSO had joined with LULAC, the G.I. Forum, ANMA, and the Alianza Hispano-Americana to form the American Council of Spanish Speaking Organizations. When the Council faltered due to lack of funding, the BCSS offered assistance. When the Council folded in 1954, the BCSS chose to maintain its ties with the CSO. Support from the CSO soon came from other quarters as well. During the mid 1950s, Saul Alinsky met regularly with Monsignor John O'Grady, the head of the National Conference of Catholic Charities (and a former member of President Truman's Commission on Immigration and Naturalization). O'Grady was intrigued by the CSO, so Alinsky arranged for Ross to take him on a whirlwind tour of fourteen chapters in July 1955. O'Grady was impressed, and he shared his enthusiasm in the *Catholic Charities Review*. For decades, O'Grady noted, Mexican Americans had “lived in fear—fear of government, fear of the big growers.” Now, with the CSO and the support of the Church, they were “ready to stand up and be counted.”¹⁶⁸

Office of the President Cesar Chavez Collection, Part 1, Box 2, Folder 4, ALUA, WSU; Rev. Fr. Julian Prieto to Rev. Fr. Frederick Crowley, September 2, 1955, UFW Office of the President Cesar Chavez Collection, Part 1, Box 2, Folder 7, ALUA, WSU.

¹⁶⁷ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,”” 59, 328-33; Duggan, “My Mind,” 22-24; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 216-17; Prouty, *César Chávez*, 16-20. Duggan quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,”” 60.

¹⁶⁸ Thomas McCullough to Most Rev. John J. Mitty, April 13, 1951, McDonnell Papers, Box 2, Folder 17, AASF; Duggan, “My

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The Spanish Mission Band priests turned toward civil rights and labor rights advocacy because they recognized a need to address ethnic Mexicans' social and material needs. "During the first few years," McCullough explained, "our main concern was that [ethnic Mexicans] . . . were being lost to the Church." The priests soon realized that reaching out to individuals, families, or even entire communities was not enough. The Church needed to tackle "larger, structural problems." The priests learned about ethnic Mexicans' social and material needs as they established their presence in dozens of barrios, visited hundreds of labor camps, and ministered to tens of thousands of Mexican Catholics. They learned about some of those larger, structural problems through their friendship with Ernesto Galarza. In the course of doing so, they helped draw the American Catholic Church into a closer relationship with the farmworker movement—a movement that Galarza sustained through the 1950s and Cesar Chavez would begin to lead in the early 1960s.¹⁶⁹

McDonnell and McCullough first crossed paths with Galarza in 1950, and their admiration for his deep understanding of agribusiness and the Bracero Program only grew stronger over the years. Herman Gallegos thus remembered being at Guadalupe Mission Chapel "many, many times" in the mid 1950s and talking with McDonnell and Chavez "about Dr. and Mrs. Galarza[,] . . . the vertically organized structure of agribusiness and the need to end the Bracero Program." Ernesto and his wife, Mae, lived in South San Jose, but Galarza's efforts to sustain the farmworker movement led him to travel constantly. He faced myriad challenges, but a turning point came in 1955 when he received funding to produce an exposé of the Bracero Program. His report, *Strangers in Our Fields*, was published in July 1956. Growers went on the attack, but Galarza's supporters came to his defense, perhaps none with more conviction than McDonnell and McCullough. The priests believed that improvements in farmworkers' wages and working conditions would improve the lives of countless ethnic Mexican families. However, like Galarza, they believed that farmworkers' lives would not be improved without a strong labor union—a belief that McDonnell shared with Chavez when they first met. Galarza had concluded that the primary obstacle to farm labor organizing was the Bracero Program. Again, the priests agreed. As historian Gina Pitti emphasizes, this shared understanding—combined with the ongoing support Galarza received from Archbishop Mitty and the Spanish Mission Band, Father Vizzard and the NCRLC, Archbishop Lucey and the BCSS, and other allies in the Church—reflected "the uniquely Catholic component of the fledgling farm labor movement."¹⁷⁰

Galarza's exposé sparked strong reactions from opponents and supporters but also from those who had given little thought to farmworkers, including leaders of organized labor. Soon after reading the report, AFL-CIO Vice President Walter Reuther, for example, authorized a small grant to support Galarza's organizing efforts. Galarza used the money to staff a few more offices of his National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU), but as writers Joan London and Henry Anderson explained, he "was still convinced that there was little point in ordinary union activities as long as Public Law 78 was intact." Congress had passed P.L. 78 in 1951, extending the Bracero Program indefinitely and, in effect, providing an endless supply of farmworkers who would break any strikes the NAWU might call. Two years later, the number of braceros working under contract reached 201,000, but the mid 1950s were pivotal years. In May 1954 the Immigration and Naturalization Service

Mind," 20; Burt, *Search*, 150-51; Fred Ross, work diary (1957), Fred Ross Papers, M0181, Box 1, Folder 19, SUL; "Dolores Huerta Talks about Republicans, Cesar Chavez, Children, and Her Home Town," *La Voz del Pueblo* (January 25, 1973), reprinted in Mario T. García, ed., *A Dolores Huerta Reader* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 165; Dolores Huerta, interview by author, Bakersfield, California, July 26, 2011; García, *Mexican Americans*, 221; Finks, *Radical Vision*, 60, 63-64; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 6; Rt. Rev. Msgr. John O'Grady, "New Life Comes from the Bottom," *The Catholic Charities Review* 39 (1955): 14-16. Huerta quoted in "Dolores Huerta Talks," 165.

¹⁶⁹ McCullough quoted in Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 216.

¹⁷⁰ Fr. Donald McDonnell to Most Rev. Hugh Donohue, April 4, 1954, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Santa Clara County," AASF; Gallegos, interview, 2012; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 128-30; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 345-47.

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announced Operation Wetback, a campaign that led to the deportation of more than one million undocumented Mexican immigrants in 1954 and early 1955. Not coincidentally, the number of braceros entering the U.S. skyrocketed to 398,000 in 1955 and an annual average that surpassed 410,000 between 1956 and 1960. While one government agency “rounded up the illegal aliens and deported them,” Galarza noted, another agency “was busily engaged in recruiting workers” and “return[ing] them to U.S. farms.”¹⁷¹

This growth in the Bracero Program—and Galarza’s exposé—opened the door for McDonnell and McCullough to develop their own line of attack. With funding from the NCRLC in 1956, McDonnell conducted his own two-year investigation of the program. Along the way, he secured Sacramento Bishop Joseph McGucken’s agreement to host a binational conference of “bracero priests” and gather their input on how the Church should assess the “problem” of farm labor in light of “Catholic Social Principles.” The Spanish Mission Band priests then launched their attack in 1957, arguing that migrant labor in general posed a grave threat to families. It exposed men to moral dangers (drinking, gambling, prostitution), it increased the burdens on wives left behind or forced into mobility themselves, it stunted the educational and spiritual development of children, and ultimately it perpetuated a cycle of poverty—the same cycle Chavez had faced five years earlier. The priests argued that the Bracero Program exacerbated these problems and undermined the development of labor unions that might help solve them. Father Francis Connell, a moral theologian from the Catholic University of America, pulled these arguments to their conclusion in April 1958. In a letter solicited by a Franciscan priest from Stockton, Alan McCoy, and reprinted in Catholic newspapers, newsletters, and magazines across the country, Connell explained that Catholic growers simply should not hire braceros because “the program . . . has so many evils connected to it.” By then, Church leaders such as Archbishop Lucey, Father Vizzard, and Monsignor Higgins had taken up the fight against the Bracero Program as well. For Lucey, it was not just a fight. It was “a gigantic battle . . . for the spirit of man, the ideals of democracy, and fundamental freedoms.” Lucey did not speak for the entire Church leadership, but his stance suggested that the relationship between the American Catholic Church and the farmworker movement was growing stronger during the 1950s. Certainly, as Gina Pitti argues, public debate over the Bracero Program was reaching “a critical turning point.”¹⁷²

The relationship between the Mexican American civil rights movement and the farmworker movement likewise pushed the debate over the Bracero Program toward a turning point. This relationship was forged, in part, by Fred Ross on one side and Galarza on the other, but McDonnell, McCullough, and Dolores Huerta also played crucial roles, and Chavez was a dynamic force in the middle. Chavez’s emergence as a leader in both movements, in fact, would take him from San Jose in September 1958 to Oxnard, California, home to one of the largest concentrations of braceros in the country. In Oxnard, Chavez would spend more than a year organizing farmworkers and documenting abuses tied to the Bracero Program on behalf of the CSO, doing so with funding from the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA).

Ross and Galarza had known each other since 1950. Just before Ross left Los Angeles that year, Edward Roybal hosted a send-off event and invited Galarza. The two men crossed paths again in San Jose in 1952, and they stayed in touch throughout the decade. McDonnell and McCullough, of course, also served as conduits between Ross and Galarza, and all of these ties came to the foreground in 1957. Early that summer, Ross was working with Dolores Huerta to strengthen the CSO chapter in Stockton. When Huerta and McCullough pressed Ross on the issue of farm labor organizing, Ross suggested that the first step would be to encourage more farmworkers

¹⁷¹ London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 130-31; Brilliant, *Color of America*, 152; Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 142; Cohen, *Braceros*, 213-14; Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 79-91; Kelly Lytle Hernández, “The Crimes and Consequences of Illegal Immigration: A Cross-Border Examination of Operation Wetback, 1943 to 1954,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (2006): 443. Galarza quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 168.

¹⁷² Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 327-36; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 217. Connell quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 335. Lucey quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 334.

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to join the CSO. "Once this was done," he thought, "a strong Labor Relations Com[mittee] could be set up . . . and the CSO could gradually move into the fight." Ross also invited Galarza to speak at a chapter meeting in Stockton, later noting that Galarza "gave a tail-raising talk on the agric[ultural] worker situation which . . . got everybody pretty zoomed up." Such efforts at the local level paved the way for a stronger relationship between civil rights and labor rights advocates at the national level. Just a few weeks after Galarza spoke in Stockton, he headed a panel discussion of farm labor and the Bracero Program at the CSO's board meeting in Los Angeles. Galarza was joined by McDonnell, McCullough, John Henning (research director for the California Federation of Labor), Bud Simonson (organizer for the UPWA), and Max Mont (executive director of the Jewish Labor Committee). The CSO board decided to create a new labor relations committee chaired by Galarza, who then made sure every CSO chapter received a copy of his report, *Strangers in Our Fields*. By the end of 1957, historian Kenneth Burt notes, the full CSO membership "voted to engage the farmworker issue."¹⁷³

These developments were promising, but McDonnell and Chavez wanted to see—and do—even more. In April 1958 McDonnell addressed a meeting of the Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking. Invoking Our Lady of Guadalupe, he implored her to restore a sense of brotherhood to the farmworkers "who seek to work in accordance with the dignity of their human nature" and the growers who controlled the nation's "gigantic multibillion dollar" agricultural industry. "We pray that she will do so," the priest concluded. "But it is not enough to pray. This is the time for action." Three months later, Chavez was in a position to act. One of Alinsky's friends, Ralph Helstein, was the head of the UPWA. The union had won elections among farmworkers in Oxnard, but growers refused to negotiate contracts. After an informal summit with Ross, Galarza, and McDonnell at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, Helstein offered to fund a CSO organizing drive, hoping that a new CSO chapter might give local workers additional leverage. Helstein wanted Chavez to lead the effort. The CSO board of directors approved the plan in July 1958, and Chavez left San Jose for Oxnard in September. As Ross understood, Chavez was pursuing a "life long desire to organize . . . the field workers from whose ranks he came and whose misery he has never been able to forget." Meanwhile, McDonnell began spending more time in San Joaquin County, where McCullough and Huerta were conducting house meetings with farmworkers and laying the foundation for a new organization, the Agricultural Workers Association (AWA), which they formally launched in January 1959. And then the AFL-CIO itself finally entered the fray. In May 1959, the labor federation chartered the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) and established its headquarters in Stockton. With McCullough's blessing, the union absorbed AWA and hired Huerta, one of AWA's most talented organizers.¹⁷⁴

The fight against the Bracero Program and the effort to establish a strong union for farmworkers would continue into the 1960s. The relationship between Chavez and Huerta would grow much stronger in the years to come, too. In the late 1950s, however, Chavez and Huerta both helped bring the Mexican American civil rights movement and the farmworker movement closer together. Both were CSO organizers and farm labor advocates. Like McDonnell and McCullough, both embraced and acted upon a Catholic commitment to social justice. For Chavez, these roles and commitments were inseparable from Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel. The mission chapel provided a vital organizing space for the CSO and thus helped sustain the Mexican American civil rights movement through the 1950s. The chapel not only served farmworkers from throughout the Santa Clara Valley, it was the starting and ending point for McDonnell's (and Chavez's) visits to labor camps, where they ministered to braceros and migrant farmworker families. Finally, the building nurtured the relationship

¹⁷³ Burt, *Search*, 133, 156-57; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 345; Barajas, *Curious Unions*, 224-25; Fred Ross, work diary (1957), Fred Ross Papers, M0181, Box 1, Folder 19, SUL.

¹⁷⁴ Rev. Donald C. McDonnell, "The Bracero Program in California," *Ninth Regional Conference, Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking, San Antonio, Texas* (April 15-17, 1958), 17; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 126-27; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 91-94; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 349-50; Pawel, *Crusades*, 51, 67-68; Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 136; McDonnell, interview; Huerta, interview. Ross quoted in Pawel, *Crusades*, 51.

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between Chavez and McDonnell themselves, serving as the site and stimulus of their conversations about modern Catholic social doctrine. The chapel thus gained national historical significance because of its association with Chavez's emergence as one of the nation's preeminent civil rights and labor rights leaders—but that association can only be understood in the context of a broader relationship between the Mexican American civil rights movement, the American Catholic Church, and the farmworker movement that Chavez would soon begin to lead.

CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES, LA CAUSA, AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 1959-1975

During the 1950s, the Mexican American civil rights movement, Catholic efforts to minister to ethnic Mexicans, and ongoing efforts to organize farmworkers became intertwined. They did so through the relationships forged by civil rights activists like Fred Ross and Dolores Huerta, activist priests like Donald McDonnell and Thomas McCullough, and labor activists like Ernesto Galarza. And, just as Cesar Chavez was a dynamic force in the middle, Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel was a dynamic space in the middle—a crucial site where Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism could converge and intertwine. This broader intertwining would last through the 1960s and into the 1970s. Its legacies would last even longer. This intertwining strengthened Mexican American civil rights and labor rights advocacy between the 1950s and the 1970s, it led to the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 and the passage of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975, it helped drive the early Latinization of the American Catholic Church, and ultimately it helped shape modern American Latino identity.

Opposing the Bracero Program and Organizing Farmworkers, 1959-1964

For Chavez, McDonnell, Galarza, and their allies, the intertwining of Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism during the mid 1950s was a promising development, but the late 1950s brought a growing sense of urgency as well as new opportunities to take action. After the INS launched Operation Wetback in 1954, the number of braceros coming to the U.S. began to skyrocket—averaging more than 410,000 annually between 1956 and 1960—and the abuses associated with the Bracero Program continued to mount. Galarza published his exposé, *Strangers in Our Fields*, in 1956, and after Galarza and McDonnell participated in a discussion of the Bracero Program at the CSO's board meeting in Los Angeles in 1957, the CSO membership voted to join the fray. By 1958, Catholic leaders such as Archbishop Lucey were denouncing the Bracero Program as the “shame and disgrace of agriculture,” a “national badge of infamy,” an “international scandal,” and a “disgrace to Christianity.” Later that year, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) decided to fund a CSO organizing drive among farmworkers in Oxnard, California, home to one of the largest concentrations of braceros in the country. Chavez agreed to spearhead the drive. Leaving San Jose in September 1958, he parted ways with McDonnell and Galarza, but the three men and their allies continued to work toward common goals: opposing the Bracero Program and organizing farmworkers. Chavez would find success on both fronts in Oxnard, but he would leave the CSO just three years later. McDonnell and Galarza would face daunting challenges of their own before the Bracero Program was finally terminated in 1964.¹⁷⁵

Chavez started laying the groundwork for a CSO chapter in Oxnard before he even found a house to rent. He introduced himself to community leaders in La Colonia, including those who had founded a local civil rights organization in response to police brutality two years earlier. When the members of this organization voted to reorganize themselves as a CSO chapter, Chavez used UPWA funds to hire one of the youngest members, John Soria, as his assistant. (After learning that Soria had read Saul Alinsky's biography of John L. Lewis, Chavez

¹⁷⁵ On the numbers of braceros see Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 91. Lucey quoted in Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 333-34. Ross quoted in Pawel, *Crusades*, 51.

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gave him a copy of Alinsky's *Reveille for Radicals*.) Within a matter of weeks, Chavez and Soria had launched a house meeting campaign, opened a CSO service center, and built the chapter membership to more than six hundred. In anticipation of the November elections that would see a pro-labor Catholic Democrat, Edmund "Pat" Brown, elected governor, Chavez and Soria also launched a voter registration campaign culminating with a get-out-the-vote effort that saw 1,108 of La Colonia's 1,348 registered voters cast their ballots—a turnout that made local politicians and growers take notice. As the CSO chapter grew, Chavez used organizing methods he had developed in San Jose, Oakland, and the Central Valley. He coordinated with local priests and community leaders, he worked with individuals to address their specific problems (as his sense of servanthood led him to do), and he empowered CSO members through committee assignments. He also developed new methods, including the use of marches—and the placement of a banner with the Virgin of Guadalupe at the front—to build solidarity among ethnic Mexicans who shared a Catholic understanding of social justice. "Among Mexicans," Chavez later explained, "a march has a very special attraction. It appeals to them—just like a pilgrimage." Chavez, of course, had a deep understanding of this appeal.¹⁷⁶

Chavez was comfortable taking his time and building a new CSO chapter slowly. As Ross stressed, short cuts in organizing "usually end in detours, which lead to dead-ends." Local UPWA organizers, however, wanted Chavez to spend less time on the broader CSO agenda and more time promoting the union that was funding his work. Soria was sympathetic to their criticisms, but his complaints are revealing. Soria recalled that the UPWA organizers simply wanted to convince workers to join the union, and they were willing to argue with those who were skeptical, but "Chavez was more for engaging the workers in do-gooder projects, like health committees, welfare committees, and fundraising drives. CSO was more like a church organization than a labor union." Chavez, moreover, "never argued with the workers. He just listened to them." Still, as Chavez listened, he learned that the core issue facing local farmworkers was the Bracero Program. Chavez had assisted Father McDonnell's ministry throughout the Santa Clara Valley, and he knew about the conditions braceros faced, but he had not fathomed how entrenched the Bracero Program was, nor how quickly it was growing in the late 1950s, nor how detrimental it was to local farmworkers in places like Oxnard, where as many as five thousand braceros lived in the Buena Vista labor camp and worked throughout Ventura County, leaving thousands of local farmworkers unemployed. Chavez, Soria, and the CSO chapter's employment committee began to tackle the issue in January 1959. Chavez soon discovered how Ventura County growers—working with corrupt officials at the Farm Placement Service—blocked local farmworkers from getting jobs and then claimed the existence of a labor shortage, which allowed them to employ braceros under the legal provisions that governed the program. Equally important, Chavez and the CSO members were able to document and expose the corruption. By May 1959, chastened growers and labor contractors were working with the CSO directly to place local farmworkers into positions. When the UPWA clamored to take over this responsibility, the CSO board of directors acquiesced—despite Chavez's reservations. With Oxnard's chapter itself on solid footing, the CSO board also asked Chavez if he would assume broader responsibilities. As the year came to a close, he agreed to move to Los Angeles and serve as executive director of the CSO.¹⁷⁷

Chavez would serve as executive director for two years. As he entered the position, the organization counted 28 chapters and nearly 10,000 members, more than 40,000 Mexican immigrants who had received naturalization assistance, more than 225,000 new voter registrations, and close ties to 100 Spanish-speaking public officials. At its annual convention in March 1960, the CSO elected a new president, Herman Gallegos, and established priorities for the coming year, including the establishment of a minimum hourly wage of \$1.25 for farmworkers,

¹⁷⁶ Ross, *Conquering Goliath*, 1-26; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 125-29; Barajas, *Curious Unions*, 227-35; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 83-89; Pawel, *Crusades*, 52-54. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 141.

¹⁷⁷ Ross, *Conquering Goliath*, 27-142; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 129-44; Barajas, *Curious Unions*, 236-58; Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 136-39; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 89-94; Pawel, *Crusades*, 54-62. Ross's "Axioms for Organizers" quoted in Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 237. Soria quoted in Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 93.

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termination of the Bracero Program, California state pension coverage for long-term resident non-citizens, the expansion of fair employment protections, and opposition to urban renewal programs. Later that year, as John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon began to vie for the presidency, the nonpartisan CSO used funding from the California Federation of Labor to launch its largest voter registration drive to date, hiring twenty organizers and ultimately registering 140,000 new voters—most of whom were then courted by the “Viva Kennedy” clubs set up by members of LULAC, the G.I. Forum, and the newly-formed Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). As CSO executive director, Chavez bore much responsibility for these efforts. Thus he worked closely with CSO president Gallegos, with Luis Zarate (Gallegos’s successor), with secretary-treasurer (and past president) Tony Ríos, and with the CSO’s first full-time lobbyist in Sacramento, Dolores Huerta—and he celebrated when Huerta pushed the CSO’s pension bill through the state legislature and watched Governor Brown sign it into law in July 1961.¹⁷⁸

As Chavez approached his tenth anniversary with the CSO in 1962, he was proud of the organization’s achievements. He was even more preoccupied with its shortcomings—its chronic lack of funding, its members’ lack of long-term commitment, and especially its middle-class members’ lack of support for farmworkers. Shortly before the annual convention in March 1962, he decided to leave the organization. For more than two years, he had been pushing middle-class members of the executive board to commit more fully to the cause of organizing farmworkers. Some of the board members finally developed a tentative plan, secured a promise of funding from a wealthy donor, and adopted a theme for the upcoming convention: “Justice for the Farm Workers.” Chavez, however, knew he did not have the full support of Tony Ríos, he did not want to depend on the wealth and whims of private donors, and he did not want to follow someone else’s plan for accomplishing what he feared was “an impossible task.” Chavez announced his resignation at the convention. A month later, Cesar, Helen, and their eight children moved to Delano, the Central Valley town where Chavez had lived and worked some twenty years earlier. Chavez’s parents and some of his siblings still lived in San Jose, but his brother Richard now lived in Delano (and served as president of the local CSO). Helen had family in Delano as well. Strategizing with family members and others he had come to know and trust—especially Fred Ross, Dolores Huerta, and another CSO stalwart, Gilbert Padilla—Chavez began laying the groundwork for the organization he and other founding members would formally launch in September 1962, the Farm Workers Association (FWA).¹⁷⁹

These early months of organizing the FWA were physically and emotionally challenging. As writer Frank Bardacke notes, Chavez had begun the year as “the director of the most powerful Mexican American organization in the United States.” Now, just after turning thirty-five years old in March 1962, he had no steady income, no financial backing, and only a handful of supporters who truly believed he could organize a viable, enduring labor union for farmworkers. Chavez had several opportunities to abandon this “impossible task,” including a lucrative offer to serve as a regional director for the Peace Corps in South America. Such offers had their appeal, but any doubts Chavez had about his decision to organize the FWA were dispelled when he participated in a Cursillo de Cristianidad (short course in Christianity). The popular Cursillos were intensive, three-day retreats designed to give Spanish-speaking Catholic men (and later women) an opportunity to discuss Christian teachings, deepen their commitment to Christ and the Catholic Church, strengthen their bonds with other participants, and develop their own capacity for clerical or, more often, lay leadership. The Cursillo movement had originated in Spain in the 1940s. It arrived among ethnic Mexican Catholics in Texas in the late 1950s and spread to communities in Arizona and California in the early 1960s. Father McDonnell and his Spanish Mission Band colleagues participated in Cursillos in Texas and Arizona in September 1960. Reynaldo Flores (a Franciscan priest working with Thomas McCullough in Stockton) participated in a Cursillo in October

¹⁷⁸ Burt, *Search*, 181, 199-201; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 6; Brilliant, *Color of America*, 168-70.

¹⁷⁹ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 145-48; Thompson, *America’s Social Arsonist*, 143-44; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 7; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 107; Pawel, *Crusades*, 63-73. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 148.

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1960, and all of these priests worked together to offer the first Cursillo in California in February 1961. Flores had joined McDonnell as an associate pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission earlier that month, and he soon came to know the extended Chavez family. Flores invited Chavez to participate in a Cursillo in July 1962—three months into Chavez’s effort to organize the FWA.¹⁸⁰

The early Cursillos revolved around three goals for the thirty to forty men who participated (the Cursillistas): to address any “erroneous ideas” they might have about Catholicism, to help them understand “what Christ has done for us,” and to prompt them to contemplate what they were “disposed to do for Christ.” Chavez’s own Cursillo notebook suggests that talks by Father Flores and others (as well as the readings, prayers, and meditations) made masculinity itself a common thread. Chavez and his fellow Cursillistas reflected on the meaning of brotherhood, the responsibilities of husbands and fathers, the connection between being a man and enduring hardships, and men’s obligations—as members of the Mystical Body of Christ—to fight for equality and social justice. To some extent, this theme reflected the sense that ethnic Mexican men still tended, erroneously, to view religion and community life as women’s concerns. The early Cursillos turned this thinking on its head and, in doing so, created a strong network of men who identified with each other, supported one another, and grew in number with each new Cursillo. Not surprisingly, Chavez tapped into this network as he organized the FWA. He did not want to alienate women or Protestants, but when given the chance, he appealed directly to other ethnic Mexican Catholic men by recognizing the hardships they had endured and by calling upon them, as men, to take up the fight for social justice. Thus the FWA Statement of Purpose began with a religious proclamation: “As Christians and workers we wish to realize the ideals of the Church in our lives and in the world in which we live.” Chavez made the beloved Cursillo song, “De Colores,” the FWA anthem, knowing its message would resonate with Cursillistas (again, without alienating anyone else). Likewise, while he had always stressed that he was not forming a labor union, he told Fred Ross a few weeks after his Cursillo that he had begun telling farmworkers he was organizing “a movement.” Chavez was organizing around a cause, “La Causa,” the fight for social justice. This is what would set his efforts apart from those that had come before and fallen short.¹⁸¹

Father McDonnell was proud of Chavez’s efforts and achievements. Ten years after they formed their bond in East San Jose, Chavez continued to see his Catholic faith as an activist faith. Invigorated by his freedom from the CSO board, by his Cursillo, and by the support he received from family members, friends, and new allies (including Reverend Chris Hartmire and Reverend Jim Drake of the California Migrant Ministry but also Abe and Anna Chavez, Julio and Josefina Hernandez, and other couples with CSO connections), Chavez was carrying that message of activism to potential members of the FWA.¹⁸²

By 1962, however, McDonnell’s own efforts to oppose the Bracero Program and organize farmworkers had

¹⁸⁰ Griswold Del Castillo and Garcia, *César Chávez*, 38; Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 52-60; Pawel, *Crusades*, 77-86; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 63-66, 110; McDonnell, interview; Alvarez, interview; “Sal Álvarez,” in *Ethnic Community Builders: Mexican Americans in Search of Justice and Power: The Struggle for Citizenship Rights in San José, California*, ed. Francisco Jiménez, Alma M. García, and Richard A. Garcia (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 276; León, *Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez*, 119-23; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 391; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 222-24; Duggan, “My Mind,” 31; Soto, “Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish,” 2; Reynaldo Flores, journal, entry dated February 3, 1961, copy in author’s possession; Reynaldo Flores, notes on eulogy for Cesar Chavez at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (San Jose, California), April 28, 1993, copy in author’s possession; “Reynaldo James Flores,” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 14, 2009, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/mercurynews/obituary.aspx?n=reynaldo-james-flores&pid=125079663> (accessed May 30, 2016).

¹⁸¹ Rev. A. Petru, “A Condensed Explanation of the ‘Cursillos’ of Christianity,” undated report, 7, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder “Spanish Speaking: Cursillo Program,” AASF; McDonnell, interview; Alvarez, interview; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 63-66; León, *Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez*, 119-23; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 391; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 222-24; García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 16-17; Pawel, *Crusades*, 82. FWA Statement of Purpose quoted in Bardacke, *Trampling*, 114.

¹⁸² McDonnell, interview; León, *Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez*, 122.

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come to an end. During the late 1950s the Spanish Mission Band priests had continued to document and denounce the abuses of the Bracero Program. Archbishop Robert Lucey and other Catholic officials led the fight at the national level, but because these men often turned to McDonnell and McCullough for input, McDonnell consolidated their thoughts in a “Farm Labor Manifesto.” Drawing upon Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and Pope Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), McDonnell acknowledged that farmworkers were obligated to work hard and take care of their employers’ property, but he noted that farmworkers also had rights, including the rights to a family and a family wage. An industry that relied on migrant labor undermined these rights. Migrant labor “compels wives and children either to be separated from husbands and fathers, or else to travel with them from place to place. Adequate housing facilities are often unavailable for migrants,” McDonnell explained, “and the opportunity for the education of children and for health, welfare, and religious services, is either lacking or seriously limited.” For nearly twenty years, the Bracero Program had compounded these problems. The program violated the Christian principles of “Social Justice and Charity” by taking advantage of “desperate poverty and depressed living conditions” in Mexico in order to create pools of workers who were not only “uprooted from stable family life” but also “denied the freedom to change their occupation” once in the U.S. “Instead of enjoying the opportunity of normal immigration,” braceros were “denied as a condition of employment their God-given right to family life.” Moreover, access to braceros enabled growers to reduce wages and thwart local farmworkers’ efforts to “organize or otherwise exercise their [own] rights.” Faced with these conditions, McDonnell concluded, farmworkers had “the right and the duty” to organize or join labor unions—not only to defend their other rights but to fulfill their obligations to “live according to the dignity of their own nature, to care for the bodily and spiritual needs of their families, and to carry out their obligations . . . to the communities in which they live.”¹⁸³

Ernesto Galarza was keeping the National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU) alive in the late 1950s, but McDonnell and McCullough saw the clear need for a new campaign to organize farmworkers. They made the case to several AFL-CIO unions, but none would make a commitment. They also appealed to the Teamsters, to no avail. Then they drove across the country to meet in person with AFL-CIO President George Meany, an Irish American Catholic. Surprised by their zeal, Meany referred them to the California Federation of Labor, which also proved to be a dead end. Exasperated, the priests tried to taunt “Organized Labor” by producing a pamphlet asking “Where is OLI?” and stamping “Where is OLI?” on their letters and other materials. When this did not work, they decided to launch their own campaign—and they enlisted the help of Dolores Huerta. In October 1958 McCullough and Huerta began using the CSO’s house meeting method to meet with ethnic Mexican and Filipino farmworkers in the northern San Joaquin Valley. “We had no fixed agenda,” McCullough recalled. “The important thing was to get people to know each other and find out what interests and problems they had in common.” Like Chavez a few years later, they emphasized that they were not forming a union, which many farmworkers associated with outsiders and strikes. They named their organization the Agricultural Workers Association, McDonnell later explained, because its acronym (AWA) sounded enough like agua (water) to convey its importance to the lives of farmworkers. In January 1959—when Chavez began tackling the problems of the Bracero Program in Oxnard—AWA held an organizational meeting in Stockton to establish committees, outline a constitution, and elect officers. A month later, AWA counted several hundred members.¹⁸⁴

The success of AWA finally convinced Meany and other AFL-CIO officials to invest in an organizing campaign. In March 1959 Jack Livingston (AFL-CIO Director of Organization) invited McCullough,

¹⁸³ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 329; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 85-90; Donald McDonnell, “Farm Labor Manifesto” (n.d.), 1-7, Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Box 5, Folder 17, AASF.

¹⁸⁴ McDonnell, interview; Huerta, interview; Duggan, “My Mind,” 22-23; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 91-94; Burns, “Mexican Catholic Community,” 219-20; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 349-50; Pawel, *Crusades*, 67-68; Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 213-14. McCullough quoted in London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 92.

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McDonnell, and Galarza to San Francisco to participate in a planning meeting for the AFL-CIO's new Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC). Passing over Galarza, Livingston hired a longtime auto industry organizer, Norman Smith, to head AWOC. Smith soon decided to base the organization in Stockton, and with McCullough's blessing he asked AWA members to dissolve their association and join AWOC once it was chartered in May 1959. To his credit, Smith agreed to hire AWA's most talented organizers, including Dolores Huerta and Rudy Delvo, a Filipino labor movement veteran (and Smith soon hired another talented Filipino organizer, Larry Itliong). Smith also asked Galarza to join the management team and serve as a training officer for new organizers. But ultimately Smith was a poor choice for the AWOC directorship, in part because he failed to appreciate how house meetings empowered AWA members. (Smith attended a few house meetings after he arrived in Stockton but talked more than he listened. After AWA folded in June, he abandoned the use of house meetings entirely.) Attendance at general meetings in Stockton began to drop off, then membership declined. Smith routinely ignored Huerta's advice, so she resigned. Galarza stayed on and tried to temper Smith's reliance on flurries of strikes that produced small wage increases but did nothing to change the structure of agribusiness nor limit growers' long-term access to braceros. Galarza did not necessarily blame Smith for being shortsighted. "Organized labor just doesn't have any answers to questions like 'What do you do about braceros?'" he noted, "because it has never had to deal with foreign contract labor in any other union." Smith's strikes generated leverage over growers, but their benefits were fleeting. Galarza still believed that farmworker unions themselves were not viable in the long run—and fundamental improvements in the lives of farmworkers were not possible—as long as the Bracero Program remained in place. He announced his own resignation from AWOC in January 1960.¹⁸⁵

McCullough and McDonnell were less critical of Smith's tactics, perhaps because they believed that even a flawed organizing effort was better than no organizing effort. So when Smith decided in December 1960 to relocate AWOC's headquarters to El Centro, a small city in California's Imperial Valley, the priests remained supportive. Smith was drawn to the Imperial Valley because a lettuce strike was about to begin. The valley's lettuce industry grossed \$20 million a year, but growers felt the pressures of rising costs and economic competition. In November 1960 growers decided to save money by eliminating the piece-rate payment, which had allowed the most productive lechugueros (lettuce cutters) to earn as much as \$4 per hour. Instead, growers would offer all workers a flat wage of \$.90 per hour. A group of lechugueros decided to protest, and they solicited help from the local office of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA). The UPWA called a strike vote and turned to Smith's AWOC for support. More than eight hundred lechugueros voted in favor of a strike, and the unions prepared to launch it in January 1961. Smith asked McCullough and McDonnell to address the workers at a rally before the strike began. The Imperial Valley was within the Diocese of San Diego, so the priests requested Bishop Charles Buddy's permission to allow them—as representatives of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference—to inform the lechugueros of their rights and responsibilities according to Catholic doctrine. Buddy gave his consent. At the rally, McCullough offered an invocation defending the workers' rights and emphasizing their duties to their families and to each other. Echoing the theme of the Cursillos he and McDonnell had participated in a few months prior, McCullough called upon the men "to love one another, to work for one another, to suffer for one another, to work for the common good, to work for justice, to work for yourselves, your families, and your community." McDonnell spoke briefly and then led everyone in a Spanish rendition of "Solidarity Forever."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 95-97, 134-35; Duggan, "My Mind," 23; Mabalon, *Little Manila*, 214, 260; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 119; Pawel, *Crusades*, 68; Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-business in California, 1947-1960* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 322-30. Galarza quoted in London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 135.

¹⁸⁶ London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 97, 135; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 95-102; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 352; Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 220; Duggan, "My Mind," 29. McCullough quoted in Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 352.

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The priests' participation in this rally would lead to the demise of the Spanish Mission Band. Within a matter of days, misleading stories were circulating about two radical priests who Bishop Buddy had sent to the rally as representatives of the Diocese of San Diego. Bishop Buddy quickly confirmed that he had not asked McCullough and McDonnell to attend on his behalf, but this allowed an avalanche of criticism to come down on the Spanish Mission Band priests. For several years, Catholic growers' resentment of these priests had been building, and even some of their fellow clergymen thought they overstepped their boundaries. Archbishop John Mitty had always defended the priests, but his health was failing in 1961, and his administrative responsibilities had fallen to Chancellor Leo Maher. Without fully explaining his reasons, Maher removed the priests from their positions with the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and instructed them to refrain from public comment on "the El Centro incident" and all other matters related to agricultural labor. Shortly thereafter, Maher dissolved the Spanish Mission Band—a decision that McCullough later said was inevitable, given the separation of three dioceses from the archdiocese and the creation of the archdiocese's Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking, which would oversee all aspects of ethnic Mexican ministry. The priests were then reassigned. McCullough was sent to a parish in Berkeley before ending up in Brentwood. John García was assigned to a parish in Oakland. Ronald Burke (who had replaced John Duggan in 1955) took charge of the archdiocese's Latin American Missionary Program and then started an assignment in Guatemala. Requesting an assignment in Latin America, McDonnell was sent to Mexico before eventually transferring to Brazil. Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel hosted a warm send-off for McDonnell on May 28, 1961.¹⁸⁷

By June 1961, the Spanish Mission Band priests were silenced. The Imperial Valley lettuce strike had failed, and the backlash left AWOC severely weakened. Chavez was busy with the CSO agenda in Los Angeles, and Galarza had folded the NAWU and returned to San Jose. Catholic leaders such as Archbishop Robert Lucey, Monsignor George Higgins, and Father James Vizzard continued to denounce the Bracero Program, but growers and their allies continued to defend it—and themselves. Stephen D'Arrigo, for example, asserted his Catholic credentials and claimed to support the Church "in her struggle to . . . bring religion to the migratory workers," but he insisted that the Bracero Program was not inherently immoral. "For a man to be away from his wife and children is not evil in itself," the San Jose grower noted. "How about men in military service, salesmen, and the like?" Other growers went on the attack, arguing that critics such as Lucey were out of their depth. "[Let them] spend their time preaching and talking about what they have been trained for," one grower wrote, "and let experienced men try to solve the problems of agriculture." Some went even further, asserting that priests like McDonnell were no better than "Commies, fellow travelers, labor agitators, do-gooders, college professors, and other theoreticians." For a variety of reasons, most Catholic officials remained silent on the subject. As historian Gina Pitti has explained, some "truly saw no evil in the farm labor arrangement, but others found it politically untenable to adopt anything but a cordial posture toward growers in their districts. Farm employers' influence and the financial pressure they could levy against the parish encouraged a conciliatory, or at least restrained, stance on the bracero issue." President Kennedy, an Irish American Catholic, had his own growing reservations about the Bracero Program and the mistreatment of Mexican nationals, especially since—given his Cold War concerns about Latin America—he had prioritized strong diplomatic relations with Mexico. Still, this was a battle he did not want to fight during his first year in office. In October 1961 he signed a two-year extension of Public Law 78, reauthorizing the Bracero Program through December 1963.¹⁸⁸

Almost one year earlier, the nation had been jolted by Edward R. Morrow's documentary on migrant labor,

¹⁸⁷ London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 97; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 352-58; Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 220-21; Duggan, "My Mind," 29-30; "Farewell," *San Jose Mercury News*, May 29, 1961.

¹⁸⁸ Bardacke, *Trampling*, 101-03; Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-business*, 335-347; Mabalon, *Little Manila*, 260; Burt, *Search*, 199-201; Brilliant, *Color of America*, 168-70; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 136-37; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 337-41. D'Arrigo quoted in Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 337. Growers quoted in Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 338.

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Harvest of Shame. But even before November 1960, there was evidence that national support for farm labor reform was growing and, consequently, support for the Bracero Program was weakening. A key figure in this change was President Eisenhower's Secretary of Labor, James Mitchell, an Irish American Catholic whose pro-labor positions gave him a reputation as "the social conscience of the Republican Party." In February 1959 Mitchell was scheduled to speak to agribusiness executives at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. When McCullough heard about this meeting, he and McDonnell gathered a group of farmworkers who belonged to AWA, led a caravan down from Stockton, and staged a silent protest from the back of the large meeting room. As McDonnell recalled, Mitchell "read all the signs, looked at the people, and . . . [said], 'Ladies and gentlemen, I recognize your presence here. Thank you.'" Mitchell then delivered a speech in which he acknowledged that the Bracero Program enabled growers "to evade the necessity to pay the wages . . . needed to attract and retain domestic farm workers." Thus too many farmworkers were "living as no American should live in this abundant land." Three months later, Mitchell visited Oxnard to speak to Ventura County growers. There, he encountered protests organized by Chavez and the local chapter of the CSO. After leaving Oxnard, Mitchell announced that he was forming a panel of consultants (including Monsignor Higgins) to investigate the impact of the Bracero Program. Not surprisingly, they found that braceros displaced domestic farmworkers and depressed wages. The consultants stopped short of calling for a termination of the program, but they insisted that fundamental reforms were needed. Mitchell made some headway, but not enough. Interviewed near the end of *Harvest of Shame*, he confessed: "I feel sad, because I think it's a blot on my conscience. . . . As a citizen, in or out of this office, I propose to continue to raise my voice until the country recognizes that it has an obligation to do something for farmworkers."¹⁸⁹

Anticipating a drawn-out debate over another extension of P.L. 78 beyond December 1963, two California congressmen introduced renewal legislation in May 1963 and secured another extension in August—but only for one additional year, and this would be the last. In September 1963 a tragedy near Chualar, California, violently illustrated the worst aspects of the Bracero Program, galvanized opposition, and brought Ernesto Galarza back into the spotlight.¹⁹⁰

At the end of the workday on September 17, 1963, fifty-six members of a bracero crew—men ranging in ages from nineteen to fifty-nine—climbed into the back of a flatbed truck (called a "bus" because it had wooden benches and a fixed canopy). The men were on their way back to a labor camp in Salinas when the driver crossed a set of railroad tracks in front a freight train traveling sixty-five miles an hour. The collision killed thirty-two men and injured twenty-five, including the co-foreman in the passenger seat. The only man not seriously injured was the foreman, who had been driving. As word of the accident spread, a member of the Salinas Central Labor Council called Galarza at his home in San Jose. By the time Galarza arrived at the scene, local growers and their allies already were downplaying the tragedy's connections to the Bracero Program, telling reporters that the accident could have happened anywhere—and that anyone connecting it to the program was "mix[ing] politics with tragedy" for their own gain. In the days and weeks to come, however, the program's opponents united to send a clear message to President Kennedy and Congress that the Bracero Program had to end. Father Vizzard, one of the first to articulate that message, recognized the larger context of civil rights and social justice struggles. "Only a few days ago the Nation was shocked by the appalling tragedy of the Birmingham church bombing which killed four Negro children," he noted. "Just as the killing of the four Negro children at Birmingham has revulsed the Nation, and may well be the turning point in the civil rights battle, so it can be hoped that the . . . bracero deaths will not be in vain. The Mexican farm labor program should be ended now." For Vizzard and other Catholic activists, the fight *for* farmworkers and *against* the Bracero

¹⁸⁹ Bardacke, *Trampling*, 99-100; "James P. Mitchell is Dead at 63," *New York Times*, October 20, 1964, <http://www.nytimes.com/1964/10/20/james-p-mitchell-is-dead-at-63.html> (accessed May 30, 2016); McDonnell, interview; Pawel, *Crusades*, 59; Barajas, *Curious Unions*, 249-52; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 140-41. Mitchell quoted in Pawel, *Crusades*, 59; and in Bardacke, *Trampling*, 99.

¹⁹⁰ London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 138; Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 134.

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Program—just like the fight *against* racism and *for* civil rights—was fundamentally a fight for human dignity. These issues became intertwined during the 1950s. By the early 1960s, they were inseparable.¹⁹¹

As historian Lori Flores emphasizes, a broad coalition of religious, labor, and civil rights organizations—the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking, the National Council of Churches, AFL-CIO unions, the CSO, LULAC, and many others—united in the aftermath of the tragedy at Chualar to express their opposition to the Bracero Program. Federal and state officials held hearings, the foreman went on trial, and the Mexican Consulate monitored the treatment of the victims and their families. Ernesto Galarza, meanwhile, began to move to the fore. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, chair of the House Committee on Education and Labor, decided to order a formal investigation of the accident, and he appointed Galarza to lead the effort. Growers and their allies, including a Congressman from the Santa Clara Valley, launched a series of personal attacks on Galarza, but he proceeded with his work over the coming months. Using lengthy testimony from the survivors and an abundance of other materials he had gathered over the years, Galarza argued that the “accident” was avoidable but also not unexpected, given the widespread disregard for the health and safety of braceros that characterized the Bracero Program as a whole. Completed in April 1964, Galarza's detailed report helped the survivors and family members of the deceased secure more than \$2 million in settlements. More important, his report insured that the Bracero Program would not be renewed past December 1964.¹⁹²

The following year, growers would seek other means of securing foreign workers who would work for low wages, even finding a provision in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 that allowed the Secretary of Labor to authorize the importation of workers from the Philippines and elsewhere, if necessary. The end of the Bracero Program in December 1964, however, set the stage for a new phase in the long struggle to organize ethnic Mexican farmworkers—and fight for their civil rights and labor rights—in the American West.¹⁹³

Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and the Ongoing Fight for Civil Rights and Labor Rights, 1959-1968

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy at Chualar, San Jose members of the CSO, the G.I. Forum, and the relatively-new Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) established a joint committee, formally denounced the Bracero Program, and became some of the very first activists to demand a Congressional investigation of the accident and its broader implications. Many of the San Jose men and women who belonged to these organizations also belonged to the community that surrounded Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel. Thus their swift response to the tragedy is no surprise. They had been mobilized and politically engaged for more than a decade, and they knew what actions needed to be taken. The mission itself lost the pastoral leadership of Father Donald McDonnell in May 1961, but it continued to grow and thrive under new leadership. The mission became its own independent parish in July 1962, and it would remain engaged with civil rights and labor rights advocacy through the 1960s. For the civil rights struggles associated with the CSO and MAPA, support from such engaged communities was important. For the labor rights struggles associated with the union that became the United Farm Workers (UFW), support from engaged *urban* communities was critical.¹⁹⁴

The remarkable growth of the Guadalupe Mission community continued through the late 1950s and into the early 1960s. This growth was a testament to the work of Father McDonnell and the engagement of ethnic

¹⁹¹ Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 135-47; Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 364-66; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 138.

¹⁹² Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 142-57; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 138-39; U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor, *Report on the farm labor transportation accident at Chualar, Calif., on September 17, 1963* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964); Ernesto Galarza, *Tragedy at Chualar: El Crucero de las Treinta y Dos Cruces* (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally and Loftin, West, 1977).

¹⁹³ Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, 158.

¹⁹⁴ Pitti, “To ‘Hear About God in Spanish,’” 365.

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Mexican Catholics in East San Jose, but it also reflected the continuing growth of the Spanish-speaking population throughout the Santa Clara Valley. When Guadalupe Mission Chapel was dedicated and consecrated in December 1953, McDonnell celebrated two Sunday Masses with a combined attendance of roughly 500. In 1958 McDonnell celebrated four Sunday Masses with a combined attendance of 1,200. By 1963, Guadalupe Mission Chapel hosted six Sunday Masses with a combined attendance of 1,500. But this was not the full story. Because Guadalupe Mission Chapel was one of only three Catholic sites in Santa Clara County offering Spanish-language services in the early 1960s, it functioned as a national parish for ethnic Mexican Catholics. The Spanish-speaking population of San Jose surpassed 25,000 and approached 90,000 in Santa Clara County in 1960. Thus thousands of Catholic families turned to the mission for baptisms, first communions, marriages, and other sacramental services. As historian Gina Pitti noted, a normal territorial parish in San Jose might celebrate 50 or 60 baptisms in a given year. In 1962 alone, Guadalupe Mission Chapel hosted 813 baptisms—plus 57 marriages, 45 funerals, 332 first communions, and 76 confirmations.¹⁹⁵

Given the mission's growth during the late 1950s, McDonnell asked the archdiocese to consider separating it from St. Patrick's Parish and establishing it as its own territorial parish. McDonnell did not know that the archdiocese already was planning to separate a larger area (including the Mayfair district) from St. Patrick's Parish in order to create Most Holy Trinity Parish. When these plans moved forward in summer 1961 (soon after McDonnell's departure) Guadalupe Mission was transferred to this new parish. Guadalupe Mission Chapel actually served as the parish church until Most Holy Trinity Church was built on Nassau Drive. When this church was completed in July 1962, Our Lady of Guadalupe was then finally granted its own status as a territorial parish and accepted by the Franciscans, who were supporting a growing network of ethnic Mexican parishes in California's booming cities, including St. Mary's (Stockton), St. Anthony's (San Francisco), St. Elizabeth's (Oakland), and St. Joseph's (Los Angeles). The new parish's first pastor was Father Anthony Soto, OFM, a 31-year-old Mexican American priest originally from Tucson, Arizona. Shortly after his installment, Soto decided to revisit the question of national parish status that Eastside Catholics first raised in the late 1940s. Soto reported to Archbishop Mitty's successor, Joseph McGucken, that Our Lady of Guadalupe "obviously . . . was a Mexican parish, and people were coming from all over." McGucken denied Soto's request, but he acknowledged the parish's importance to the larger ethnic Mexican population and authorized Soto "to accept Mexican people from wherever, if . . . it will do harm to turn them away." Guadalupe Parish thus would continue to function, in Soto's words, as "a national parish but without the legal permissions." At the same time, Soto and his associate pastor, Father Reynaldo Flores, worked to establish Guadalupe Parish as a Cursillo Center. The Franciscans already had taken a leading role in spreading the Cursillo movement throughout California, and Soto noted that "a large number of the [Guadalupe] parish men . . . [were] active as 'Cursillistas.'" McGucken agreed to the designation, further solidifying the parish's position as an important hub in a larger regional network of ethnic Mexican Catholics.¹⁹⁶

Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish would continue to grow and thrive under Father Soto's pastoral leadership, which continued for ten years. In 1967, half way through Soto's tenure, a feature story in the *San Jose Mercury News* celebrated a "people-oriented parish" that drew strength from its "Mexican-American heritage" and from "the Cursillo spirit." It was "a parish of sharing [but] . . . not one of great material wealth," and it was known for its "commitment to social justice." The parish was still the home of a credit union, a health clinic, and the local chapter of the CSO. It also had become the home of international Catholic organizations such as the St. Vincent

¹⁹⁵ "Report for 1954"; Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 148; "Proposal to make Our Lady of Guadalupe a territorial parish" (n.d.), Ministry to the Spanish Speaking, A67.1, Folder "Guadalupe Center, San Jose," AASF; Soto, "Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish," 2-3; Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 198-99; McDonnell, "1958 Report on Guadalupe Center, San Jose, California"; "Feast of Epiphany" program (January 2, 1972), copy in parish scrapbook, OLGP.

¹⁹⁶ Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 198-99; Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 227-30; Soto, "Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish," 1. Soto quoted in Pitti, "To 'Hear About God in Spanish,'" 199.

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de Paul Society as well as a Head Start program, a Center for Employment Training, and other community initiatives supported by President Johnson's War on Poverty. The Guadalupanas continued to provide parish leadership, bearing responsibility for religious education, social services, fundraisers, and fiestas. The parish also still offered six Sunday Masses, and it remained one of only three places in Santa Clara County offering services for a Spanish-speaking population that surpassed 120,000 in 1967. The chapel building now served as the parish church, but the parish had long outgrown the building's 250-person capacity. During Father McDonnell's tenure, the mission had acquired eight acres of property along South Jackson Avenue, two blocks east of the chapel/church building. After the California Highway Department notified the parish of its intention to acquire this property for the construction of Interstate 680, the parish acquired nine acres of undeveloped property adjacent to the chapel/church building and extending northwest to East San Antonio Street. In 1967, the parish sold its property on South Jackson and moved forward with plans to construct a modern, reinforced-concrete church, rectory, and other buildings on this new property. When the new church was completed in 1968, the parish began to develop plans for converting the old chapel/church building into a parish hall with kitchens, classrooms, and a meeting room that would continue to serve the parish and the larger community.¹⁹⁷

As the Guadalupe Parish community continued to grow during the 1960s, its members remained engaged with civil rights and labor rights issues in East San Jose and beyond. Some of this engagement was channeled through the local chapter of the CSO, which in the early 1960s saw two founding members (Herman Gallegos and Luis Zarate) serve terms as national CSO president and a third (Chavez) serve as executive director. Under their leadership, the CSO had continued to prioritize naturalization assistance for immigrants and voter registration drives, especially when the California Federation of Labor funded a campaign that produced 140,000 new voters in 1960. CSO chapters continued to pressure local officials to provide improvements in their communities and protections from discrimination, and they lobbied officials at the state level on issues such as pension coverage for long-term resident non-citizens and a minimum wage for farmworkers. Working with Ernesto Galarza and other allies, the CSO also lobbied state and federal officials to oppose any further extensions of the Bracero Program.¹⁹⁸

Successes on many of these fronts helped the CSO maintain its status as the preeminent civil rights organization for Mexican Americans in the early 1960s. At the same time, the political climate was changing. Fears of Communist subversion had subsided and, among Mexican Americans, immigration had become less of a divisive issue. In fact, the CSO's own pronounced concern for *all* Mexican immigrants—including braceros and undocumented immigrants—had worked to soften the anti-immigrant stance advocated by LULAC and the G.I. Forum. The CSO's anti-Communist credentials and pro-immigrant positions thus became less important as distinguishing factors, allowing LULAC, the G.I. Forum, and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) to build their own political influence—as they did, in part, by establishing “Viva Kennedy” clubs and courting those 140,000 new voters in 1960. More broadly, African American civil rights activists' growing emphasis on boycotts, sit-ins, and other forms of nonviolent direct action—as well as the entrenchment of the Bracero Program—filled the Mexican American civil rights movement with a growing sense of urgency. Thus, even as CSO founding member Edward Roybal became the first Mexican American from California elected to Congress in the twentieth century, the CSO's strength, relative to other Mexican American civil rights organizations, was beginning to decline.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Joan Johnson, “Guadalupe: ‘Open Door’ Parish,” *San Jose Mercury News* (n.d., ca. 1967), copy in parish scrapbook, OLGP; Rev. Anthony Soto to Archdiocesan Building Commission, July 17, 1964, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; Rev. Anthony Soto to Most Rev. Joseph T. McGucken, July 21, 1967, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR; Manuel Villarreal, proposal submitted to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, February 6, 1968, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Jose), Box 1, DSJAR.

¹⁹⁸ Gallegos, interview, 1988; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 6.

¹⁹⁹ Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 170-78; Burt, *Search*, 199-201; Garza, *Organizing*, unpaginated ch. 6; Pitti, “The American Latino

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The 1962 elections that sent Roybal to Congress saw the re-election of California Governor Pat Brown. The importance of Mexican American voters to Brown's re-election but also to John F. Kennedy's election in 1960 and Lyndon B. Johnson's election in 1964 ensured that the CSO would have continued access to state and federal officials through the mid 1960s. As historian Kenneth Burt notes, the CSO also "continued to be the dominant force" at the local level, especially when it came to "registering voters and lining up appointments to boards and commissions that provided a civic voice." But internal factors—combined with broader changes in the political climate—hastened the CSO's decline after 1962. In San Jose and elsewhere, for example, internal economic and generational divides were becoming more of a liability. The men and women who had joined the CSO in the early 1950s tended to come from working-class backgrounds. By the early 1960s, the CSO's newer, younger members were more likely to have completed high school and attended college, and many had middle-class incomes and priorities. The CSO's older members were proud of the organization's nonpartisanship. Younger members, on the other hand, wanted the CSO to endorse Mexican American candidates—yet these members tended to favor moderates who de-emphasized discrimination and other issues that remained important to older, working-class members. To some extent, Chavez's decision to resign from the CSO in 1962 reflected his own frustration with these internal divides. Certainly, the CSO was not the same after he left. Fred Ross's biographer describes Chavez's departure as "a major blow" not only for the CSO—which soon lost Dolores Huerta, Gilbert Padilla, and Herman Gallegos as well—but also for Ross, whose heart was no longer with the organization. Over the course of fifteen years, the CSO had helped produce a generation of politically-empowered Mexican Americans and a cohort of remarkable leaders, but Mexican American civil rights and labor rights activism began to find other channels, in East San Jose and beyond.²⁰⁰

One of these channels was the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), an organization that traced its roots to Roybal's mobilization of Mexican American leaders who felt frustrated by their lack of clout within the two major political parties. At the founding convention in April 1960, Roybal spoke to an audience comprised primarily of small business owners, professional men, and politically active women, all with various ties to the CSO, LULAC, the G.I. Forum, civic clubs, labor unions, the Democratic Party, and the Catholic Church. Roybal called upon them to create a new organization that would pursue "the social, economic, cultural, and civil betterment of Mexican Americans and all other Spanish-speaking Americans, through political action." Among the leaders were longtime activists such as Eduardo Quevedo and Bert Corona (who were involved with El Congreso in 1939), Manuel Ruiz (who founded the Coordinating Council for Latin American Youth in 1941), and Ignacio López (the activist who mentored Fred Ross as they founded Unity Leagues in 1946). One of the younger members, not quite 30 years old, was the newly-elected national CSO president, Herman Gallegos. For him, MAPA was a necessary next step beyond the CSO. As he later explained, the CSO had helped Mexican Americans *build* political power, but MAPA now sought to *use* this power to put Mexican Americans and their allies in public office. Gallegos would break with the CSO soon after Chavez resigned, but his community work and civil rights activism continued. In 1965 he began serving as a consultant to the Ford Foundation, advising on issues important to Mexican American communities. He helped make the case for the creation of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and—working with Ernesto Galarza and sociologist Julian Samora—he persuaded the Ford Foundation to fund the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). When the organization was launched in 1968 (as the Southwest Council of La Raza), Gallegos served as its first executive director, a position that allowed him to funnel financial and political support to scores of worthwhile community projects from San Francisco to San Antonio.²⁰¹

Heritage," 27.

²⁰⁰ Pitti, *Devil in Silicon Valley*, 169-71; Pawel, *Crusades*, 49-50; Thompson, *America's Social Arsonist*, 142-50; Gallegos, interview, 1988; Gallegos, interview, 2012.

²⁰¹ Burt, *Search*, 179-84, 216-17; García, *Memories*, 195-203; Gallegos, interview, 1988; Gallegos, interview, 2012; "Julian Samora, 75, a Pioneering Sociologist," *New York Times*, February 6, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/06/us/julian-samora-75-a>

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Another young member of the Guadalupe Parish community who began to seek other channels for civil rights and labor rights activism in the 1960s was Salvador Alvarez, the son of Mexican immigrants. The Alvarez family had settled in East San Jose in 1950, when Salvador was 10 years old. The family attended Mass at St. John Vianney's Church and sought Spanish-language services at Five Wounds, but then they began to hear about the missionary work of Father Donald McDonnell. Even though they did not live within the boundaries of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission, the mission chapel became their destination on Holy Days and other special occasions throughout the 1950s. "On Good Fridays, for the Stations of the Cross," Alvarez remembered, "everybody from the barrio would be at Guadalupe." McDonnell's respect for Mexican Catholic customs such as the Vía Crucis made a deep impression. The priest "had this long telephone pole in the shape of a cross," and it was so heavy it took twenty men to carry it. As a teen-ager, Alvarez realized that McDonnell was amplifying a message of servanthood and solidarity. One person could not carry the cross, but by "bearing the cross together, we could do it." Attending high school during the mid 1950s, Alvarez formed a lifelong friendship with Luis Valdez (future founder of El Teatro Campesino), and they split a scholarship that allowed both to attend San Jose State College. There, Alvarez combined his Catholic faith with a growing interest in civil rights and social justice issues. He participated in a Cursillo in 1962, around the same time as Cesar Chavez, and it was "a life-changing experience." Alvarez had once considered the priesthood, but after graduating in 1963 he ended up taking the advice of Herman Gallegos, who encouraged him to pursue a master's degree in social work. Attending the University of California, Berkeley, in the mid 1960s, Alvarez formed bonds with other members of the emerging Chicano Movement (including the founder of Quinto Sol Publications, Octavio Romano), and together they monitored the farmworkers' strike that erupted in Delano in September 1965.²⁰²

The Delano strike offered members of the Guadalupe Parish community a new channel for civil rights and labor rights activism, of course, but the community had been advocating for farmworkers since McDonnell, Chavez, and Gallegos began visiting labor camps and working with Fred Ross to organize their CSO chapter in the early 1950s. Advocacy for farmworkers remained a priority for the parish in the early 1960s. Before arriving as the pastor at Guadalupe Parish, Father Anthony Soto had published an advisory booklet titled *Migrants in Your Parish*. After arriving, he and Father Reynaldo Flores continued to call for equal treatment and respect for farmworkers—but also better housing, public education, job training, and job opportunities. Likewise, other members of the broader parish community continued to denounce the Bracero Program and defend the rights of farmworkers in the Santa Clara Valley and beyond. When Chavez led members of his farmworkers' association out on strike, his former fellow parishioners were prepared to help.²⁰³

Chavez had decided to make farmworker advocacy his life's mission when he announced his resignation from the CSO in March 1962. His Cursillo helped him confirm that commitment four months later. Working closely with Dolores Huerta and other founding members, Chavez formally launched the Farm Workers Association (FWA) in September 1962. The next two years presented numerous challenges. For example, delegates at the founding convention had set dues at \$3.50 per month, but Chavez hoped to refrain from collecting dues until a life insurance benefit was in place. Five months later, the organization's treasury was empty, but an insurance plan had not been purchased. Chavez decided to send out dues notices and saw membership drop from 498 to 160. After pleading with those who were on the fence, the number climbed back above 250, but this still was fewer than the insurance company had expected, so Chavez had to accept a more expensive plan. Drawing inspiration from Father McDonnell's efforts in East San Jose ten years prior, Chavez also wanted to establish a credit union. His application for a charter was approved, but he needed additional capital. He turned to his

pioneering-sociologist.html (accessed May 30, 2016); DeSipio, "Demanding Equal Political Voice," 279.

²⁰² Alvarez, interview; "Sal Alvarez," in *Ethnic Community Builders*, 271-79; Valdez, interview.

²⁰³ Rev. Anthony Soto, OFM, *Migrants in Your Parish* (Chicago: Bishops' Committee for Migrant Workers, n.d.); "Job Training, Respect Needed for Migrant Families," *San Jose Mercury News*, October 2, 1964.

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brother, Richard, who took out a mortgage in October 1963 and loaned the FWA \$3,500 to launch its credit union. Despite her own heavy workload, Helen agreed to manage the operation. The next challenge was to find a location for offices somewhere other than the small house Cesar and Helen had rented in Delano. They found a building on the western outskirts of town, but it needed work. While Richard completed the renovations, FWA members raised funds and found furnishings in time for a grand opening in September 1964. By the time Chavez recruited a volunteer, Bill Esher, to produce a newspaper, *El Malcriado*, a few months later, the association had been re-named the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). At the beginning of 1965, the reputation of the NFWA was spreading, its membership had soared past 900, and its future looked bright.²⁰⁴

At the beginning of 1965—for the first time in more than twenty years—growers and other agricultural employers across the U.S. had no access to braceros. Ernesto Galarza's persistence had paid off, but McDonnell, Chavez, and many other men and women also contributed to the fight against the Bracero Program during the 1950s and early 1960s. As these activists built their case, Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism became intertwined. An even broader coalition of religious, labor, and civil rights organizations came together after the tragedy at Chualar, ensuring that the program would be terminated at the end of 1964. Chavez thus knew that the long struggle to organize ethnic Mexican farmworkers—and fight for their civil rights and labor rights—had entered a new phase at the beginning of 1965. Yet Chavez did not anticipate how quickly the end of the Bracero Program would impact his own plans for building the NFWA. In the aftermath of the Imperial Valley lettuce strike in January 1961, Norman Smith had been replaced as head of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) by another veteran labor organizer from the East Coast, but Larry Itliong and other Filipinos also took on important leadership roles. In May 1965, Filipino grape pickers who belonged to AWOC went on strike in California's Coachella Valley, seeking (and getting) wages of \$1.40 per hour. When the harvest moved north toward Delano, Itliong notified local growers that their Filipino workers demanded the same pay. Delano area growers were less inclined to give in, so several hundred members of AWOC voted to go on strike on September 8, 1965. Eight days later, on Mexican Independence Day, more than 1,300 members of Chavez's NFWA voted to join them.²⁰⁵

The Delano grape strike would continue almost five years, until twenty-seven growers signed contracts that provided union recognition, pay increases, benefits, and worker protections in July 1970. Members of the Guadalupe Parish community provided support from the very beginning. When it became clear that the strike would not end quickly, they began to collect food, clothes, and cash donations. In mid October 1965, Chavez made the first of many whirlwind visits to the Bay Area to build support among young activists and other urban allies. When he spoke to five hundred students gathered in Berkeley's Sproul Plaza, he told them that forty-four people, including his wife, had been arrested in Delano for using the word "huelga" (strike). The students, many of whom were already fighting for free speech and other civil rights, offered enthusiastic support. After speaking at Mills College, San Francisco State, and Stanford, Chavez then ended the day at the Santa Clara County Labor Temple in San Jose, where Father Soto and other religious, labor, and civil rights leaders hosted a rally and raised \$2000. Ten days later, Guadalupe parishioners and other supporters caravanned to Delano with their first truckload of donated food and clothing.²⁰⁶

The following spring, Chavez launched a 300-mile march from Delano to Sacramento. The march was organized around three Lenten themes—pilgrimage, penitence, and revolutionary change—and a banner with

²⁰⁴ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 173-78; Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 237-41; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 149; Pawel, *Crusades*, 91-104; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 108-33.

²⁰⁵ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 182-85; Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 241-43; London and Anderson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, 59-60, 150-51; Pawel, *Crusades*, 105-06; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 150-61.

²⁰⁶ "'Viva La Causa!' San Joseans on the Line With Strikers in Delano," *San Jose Mercury News*, October 29, 1965; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 193; Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 244-45; Pawel, *Crusades*, 113-14; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 172.

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the Virgin of Guadalupe was always at the front. Again, members of the Guadalupe Parish community were involved. Luis Valdez, whose family moved to East San Jose in 1953, had returned to Delano in October 1965, joined the strike, and launched El Teatro Campesino. As the marchers began making their way to Sacramento in March 1966, they would start each day with a Mass, walk at least ten miles, and end each day with a rally during which Valdez read a manifesto (the “Plan de Delano,” modeled after Emiliano Zapata’s “Plan de Ayala”), Chavez spoke, El Teatro Campesino performed their satirical skits, and marchers and local supporters sang songs, closing with “De Colores.” With permission from Archbishop Joseph McGucken, Father Soto and twenty families from Guadalupe Parish participated in a leg of the march. Sixty parish families later caravanned to Sacramento, where they joined eight thousand farmworkers and supporters on April 10, 1966, to celebrate Easter Sunday and a tentative contract agreement with one of Delano’s corporate growers.²⁰⁷

The strike continued to attract supporters from across the country (including dedicated volunteers like LeRoy Chatfield and prominent allies such as AFL-CIO Vice President Walter Reuther and Senator Robert F. Kennedy), it saw the NFWA and AWOC merge to form the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), and it secured a handful of contract agreements. But the intransigence of the Giumarra family and other Delano area growers produced a stalemate that had entered its third year when Chavez decided to put the union’s resources behind an international table grape boycott—one that targeted not just the growers but also the grocery stores that carried their grapes. The union had begun to experiment with limited boycotts in 1966. Now, in January 1968, the table grape boycott began to arrive in cities across the U.S. and Canada with full force. In San Jose, members of the Guadalupe Parish community provided the kind of support that was critical to the boycott’s success. Andres Chavez, a young Franciscan seminarian and former farmworker, helped organize the local boycott effort. He volunteered because the farmworker movement was “more than just a labor movement,” it was a fight for “dignity.” Guadalupe Parish became the local boycott headquarters, and one of the first targets was a Safeway grocery store in East San Jose. The Safeway chain proved to be almost as intransigent as the growers, but the boycott took hold across the country, and Delano area growers began to feel the impact. In July 1969, they filed a lawsuit against the UFWOC claiming the boycott had cost them \$25 million in sales. Had President Nixon’s Department of Defense not increased its purchases of table grapes from 7 million pounds in 1968 to 11 million pounds in 1969, the losses would have been even higher.²⁰⁸

As the strike was in its third year and the table grape boycott was still taking hold, Chavez became concerned by new signs that union members were growing impatient, frustrated, and open to the use of violence. He thus called a meeting on February 19, 1968, to announce that he had begun to fast and would continue to do so until union members re-committed themselves to nonviolence. Chavez would end up fasting for twenty-five days, and he spent most of that time in a small building at the union’s new headquarters three miles west of downtown Delano, a property known as “Forty Acres.” Thousands of farmworkers and supporters streamed to Forty Acres to visit with Chavez, pray for him, and participate in nightly ecumenical services filled with music and fellowship. Members of the Guadalupe Parish community offered their prayers, too, and some were among the thousands who joined Chavez as he broke his fast on March 10, 1968. Chavez also received an important visit from a longtime member of the parish community, Salvador Alvarez. In 1967, Alvarez had been hired by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and named the new executive director of the Bishops’ Committee for the Spanish Speaking—the organization created in 1945 to help the American Catholic Church address the needs of ethnic Mexicans. Although many members of the Catholic clergy supported the Delano strike, most

²⁰⁷ “Strikers March,” *San Jose Mercury News* (n.d.), clipping in parish scrapbook, OLGP; Johnson, “Guadalupe: ‘Open Door’ Parish”; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 206-18; Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 246-47; Pawel, *Crusades*, 109-11, 124-30; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 199-211, 221.

²⁰⁸ “Future Priest Heading San Jose Grape Boycott,” *East San Jose Sun* (n.d.), clipping in parish scrapbook, OLGP; “Downtown Marchers Protest Grape Sales,” *San Jose Mercury News*, December 7, 1969; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 263-71, 301; Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 245, 249-51; Pawel, *Crusades*, 182-91; Bardacke, *Tramplng*, 313-18, 327-29.

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Church officials remained reluctant to get involved. Meeting with Chavez during his fast, Alvarez asked him plainly, “What do you need from the Church?” Chavez told him he wanted the Church to stand with the farmworkers in their struggle for justice. “We don’t ask for words,” Chavez said. “We ask for deeds. We don’t ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood.” The full statement Alvarez would take back to the Church helped put the wheels of change into motion. In the months and years to come, Church leaders would play important roles in bringing about the end of the Delano strike in July 1970 and in securing passage of California’s Agricultural Labor Relations Act in June 1975.²⁰⁹

When Chavez ended his fast on March 10, 1968, Robert Kennedy was his guest of honor. Two weeks later, Kennedy, now running for the Democratic nomination for president, visited East San Jose and attended what he called “a beautiful Mass” at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. More than 1,200 parishioners welcomed the candidate and expressed their support. Campaigning for Kennedy, Chavez made his own visit to East San Jose in May, attended Mass at Guadalupe Church, thanked everyone for supporting the strike and boycott, and urged them to vote in the primary election. Chavez was back again in August, driving through with writer Peter Matthiessen after meeting with Archbishop McGucken and Congressman Phillip Burton in San Francisco. “Of the many communities he has known since leaving the Gila River Valley,” Matthiessen later wrote, “Chavez identifies most strongly with Sal Si Puedes.” As they drove, Chavez “pointed out a wooden church that he had helped to build. . . . [This] was the first community that he organized for the CSO,” Matthiessen noted, “and there is scarcely a house in these small streets that he hasn’t been in.” By that point, it had been almost a decade since Chavez left East San Jose for Oxnard, but he remained a strong presence in the Guadalupe Parish community—and the members of that community were a vital presence in the farmworker movement he was leading. The Delano strike itself was still more than a year away from its resolution, but Chavez’s union might not have survived even that long if not for the support of ethnic Mexican Catholics who, like Chavez, understood their faith to be an activist faith that called upon its adherents to fight for social justice.²¹⁰

La Causa and the Early Latinization of the American Catholic Church, 1965-1975

Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in October 1962 and it remained open until December 1965. It was a transformative event, generating a host of reforms that not only brought the Catholic Church closer to the people but emphasized that the Church *is* the people. In some places, such changes were underway before the 1960s. In Chicago, for example, a monsignor recalled priests in the 1950s who, like Donald McDonnell in San Jose and Thomas McCullough in Stockton, were “involved in raising the money, attending the meetings, picketing and marching with their people. Those men had a sense of history, a sense of neighborhood, a sense of church; they knew without Vatican II telling them that it was where the church should be, where the church *was* church: out fighting for justice for the people.” An examination of the farmworker movement shows that these views spread even further after the Second Vatican Council, in part because ethnic Mexican Catholics helped fill the ranks of the farmworker movement and Catholics in the U.S. (and beyond) helped fill the ranks of its supporters. Catholic laity and clergy thus played important roles in the movement, but Catholicism itself infused La Causa. Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism remained intertwined—and this helped drive the early Latinization of the American Catholic Church and ultimately helped shape modern American Latino identity.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 272-87; Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 250; Pawel, *Crusades*, 157-69; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 293-307; Prouty, *César Chávez*, 32; Alvarez, interview; “Sal Álvarez,” in *Ethnic Community Builders*, 280-81; Cesar E. Chavez, “The Mexican-American and the Church,” in *Voices: Readings From El Grito, 1967-1973*, ed. Octavio Ignacio Romano-V. (Berkeley, CA: Quinto Sol Publications, 1973), 218. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops is now the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

²¹⁰ “1,000 Join Bobby at S. J. Mass,” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 25, 1968; “Chavez to Speak,” *East San Jose Sun* (n.d., ca. May 1968), clipping on parish scrapbook, OLGP; Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 293.

²¹¹ Monsignor quoted in Finks, *Radical Vision*, 169-70.

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Cesar Chavez's own Catholic faith and spirituality certainly infused the farmworker movement. Looking back on his spiritual development, Chavez acknowledged that he had been on the verge of despair in the early 1950s. While others might have abandoned their faith, the lessons he learned from Father Donald McDonnell turned him around. "I went the other way," he explained. "I drew closer to the Church the more I learned and understood." Chavez's participation in a Cursillo in the early 1960s—and his continued involvement in the Cursillista network—propelled his spiritual development even further. In the years to come, his faith and spirituality were widely recognized. As historian Mario García has noted, some of Chavez's followers "saw him as a saint," and some theologians now "refer to him as a mystic." Perhaps he was neither or perhaps he was both, García concludes, "but he was above all a man of deep faith, and it was this faith, this spirituality that guided him in his life and work." As Chavez himself explained, he did not think he could base his "will to struggle" on "cold economics or on some political doctrine." For him, "the base must be faith."²¹²

In the context of La Causa, Chavez's Catholic faith and spirituality found expression in his emphasis on nonviolence, his framing of the march to Sacramento, and his fasts. His commitment to nonviolence originally was shaped by his mother, whose teachings helped him respond to the hostility he and his siblings faced as young migrant farmworkers. This commitment was strengthened by studying Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., which suggested that nonviolence would give farmworkers the moral authority they would need to build support. Yet nonviolence was more than just a strategy. As García notes, Chavez emphasized that nonviolence reflected a fundamental "recognition of the value of human life," because only those who "did not recognize the humanity of others" would resort to violence. The march to Sacramento likewise reflected more than strategy. To be sure, Chavez realized that the Lenten themes of pilgrimage, penitence, and revolutionary change would appeal to a wide swath of farmworkers and supporters. He also sensed that the public dimensions of the marchers' suffering—their sweat, blisters, and bloodied feet—would give them moral authority. But he also knew their suffering would make them strong. "This was a penance more than anything else," Chavez later explained, "and it was quite a penance, because there was an awful lot of suffering involved in this pilgrimage, a great deal of pain." But the march "was an excellent way of training ourselves to endure the long, long struggle." It would make them "fit not only physically but also spiritually." Chavez's fasts had the same goals. He emphasized, for example, that his first public fast was not a "hunger strike," because the purpose was not political. As he told the National Council of Churches, the fast was informed by his "religious faith" and his "deep roots in the Church." It was not intended to pressure anyone, it simply reflected his "need to do penance and to be in prayer." Dolores Huerta amplified this explanation. "I know it's hard for people who are not Mexican to understand," she told writer Jacques Levy, "but this is part of the Mexican culture—the penance, the whole idea of suffering for something, of self-inflicted punishment. It's a tradition of very long standing." Chavez's public fasts (in 1968, 1972, and 1988) are well known, but he also conducted short, private fasts fairly regularly—as a form of penance but also to gain clarity, patience, fortitude, and a heightened sense of spirituality. For Chavez, these fasts were "a very personal form of self-testing and prayer."²¹³

Chavez's words, decisions, and actions—public and private—reveal how his personal faith and spirituality infused the farmworker movement, but Catholicism and farmworker advocacy were more broadly intertwined. Thus ethnic Mexican farmworkers themselves brought their Catholicism into their movement. Shortly after

²¹² García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 19; León, *Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez*, 122. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 27.

²¹³ García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 63; León, *Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez*, 100-06, 138-45; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 232-35; Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 180; Stephen R. Lloyd-Moffett, "The Mysticism and Social Action of César Chávez," in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, ed. Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38-39. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 207. Chavez letter to National Council of Churches quoted in Lloyd-Moffett, "Mysticism and Social Action," 38. Huerta quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 277.

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Father Mark Day was assigned to minister to the movement on a full-time basis in 1967, Chavez told the Franciscan priest that “most farmworkers are Chicanos . . . and most Chicanos are Catholics.” Most ethnic Mexican farmworkers identified with the Church, Chavez affirmed—even if, at that point, the Church did not seem to identify with them. Chavez often said that “farmworkers are ordinary people, not saints,” but most attended Mass services and prayer meetings and remained mindful of their obligations as Catholics during the course of the strike. Most also continued to draw strength from the Virgin of Guadalupe. As plans for the march to Sacramento unfolded, Chavez knew he wanted a banner with the Virgin of Guadalupe at the front. (A few farmworkers objected, so Chavez asked for a vote. “We put the Virgin to a motion,” Huerta quipped, “and virginity won.”) In his “Plan de Delano,” Luis Valdez began to explain why: “At the head of the Pilgrimage we carry La Virgen de Guadalupe . . . because she is ours, all ours, Patroness of the Mexican people.” The Virgin of Guadalupe, he later elaborated, “was the first hint . . . that the pilgrimage implied social revolution. During the Mexican Revolution, the peasant armies of Emiliano Zapata carried her standard, not only because they sought her divine protection, but because she symbolized the Mexico of the poor and humble. Beautifully dark and Indian in feature,” Valdez emphasized, “she is a Catholic saint of Indian creation—a Mexican.” A banner with Guadalupe was present at every subsequent march and rally. When a judge limited the number of people who could picket a ranch, three women suggested they pray instead—so Richard built a mobile shrine to Guadalupe in the back of Cesar’s old station wagon. The Virgin of Guadalupe was present in farmworkers’ homes, on the picket lines, in *El Malcriado* and other publications, in the NFWA offices, at Forty Acres, and elsewhere. She was an ever-present reminder of the faith that most of the farmworkers shared.²¹⁴

Some farmworkers and movement supporters were less enthusiastic about the presence of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the movement and the infusion of Catholicism her presence represented. These sentiments came to light when Chavez presented plans for the march to Sacramento to the NFWA membership. Epifanio Camacho, a seasoned farmworker with a strong sense of anticlericalism, objected to the use of any religious symbols in the march. He and a few other farmworkers wanted marchers to emphasize their self-reliance by carrying nothing but NFWA banners and flags. At the same time, some of the union’s young, white, Protestant and Jewish supporters were puzzled by the theme of “penitence.” As writer Peter Matthiessen recounted, these supporters did not see “the slightest reason for atonement on the workers’ part—weren’t the workers the victims? Like most of the Anglo volunteers, [Marshall] Ganz disliked the Catholic aura that the Virgin of Guadalupe would give, and so did the scattered Protestants among the Mexicans.” Chavez’s first public fast brought out similar sentiments. Antonio Orendain quickly dismissed the fast as an absurd waste of time. According to Matthiessen, Orendain and Camacho, “as well as other Protestants and agnostics . . . still resented the Catholic aura of the Sacramento march and now felt offended all over again.” They were supported by white volunteers “who disliked any religious overtone whatsoever.” Chavez never wanted to alienate non-Catholics, though. In fact, he cultivated and often celebrated the movement’s religious diversity. Among the most important supporters of the FWA (and its later incarnations) were Reverend Chris Hartmire (Presbyterian), Reverend James Drake (United Church of Christ), and their colleagues in the California Migrant Ministry, but Chavez embraced supporters from all religious backgrounds. “It’s beautiful to work with other groups, other ideas, and other customs,” he once observed. “We have labor people and church people, Protestants like Jim Drake and Chris Hartmire, participating Catholics who came from religious orders, Jewish kids, and agnostics. It’s amazing [how] they all work together.”²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Luis Valdez, “Plan of Delano,” reprinted in Jensen and Hammerback, eds., *Words of César Chávez*, 17; Luis Valdez, “The Tale of The Raza,” *Ramparts Magazine* (July 1966), 42; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 226-27, 275; Mark Day, *Forty Acres: Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 113. Chavez quoted in Day, *Forty Acres*, 58. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 197. Huerta quoted in Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 128.

²¹⁵ Bardacke, *Trampling*, 214; Matthiessen, *Sal Si Puedes*, 127-28, 181; Ferris and Sandoval, *Fight in the Fields*, 143; Ronald A. Wells, “Cesar Chavez’s Protestant Allies: The California Migrant Ministry and the Farm Workers,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (Spring/Summer 2009): 5-16. Chavez quoted in Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 197.

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It would be wrong to understate the importance of faith and spirituality in the farmworker movement, especially the action-oriented Catholic faith that Chavez learned from Father McDonnell in the 1950s and passed on to younger civil rights and labor rights activists in the 1960s and 1970s. As theologian Frederick John Dalton notes, Chavez “respected other religions and moral traditions, actively promoted an ecumenical spirit within the union, and incorporated meditation and yoga into his own spirituality,” but Chavez was always clear about his own lifelong identification as “a member of the Catholic faith community, a community with a long tradition of teaching on moral issues.” This identification informed Chavez’s disappointment with the institutional Catholic Church’s early neutrality in the Delano strike. Many individual Catholic priests (such as Father James Vizzard of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference) and many individual parishes (such as Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in East San Jose) offered their full support for the striking farmworkers—but most Delano area growers were Catholic, and they had many allies in California’s Central Valley. Most Church officials thus decided it was best to avoid taking sides. An early indication that this stance might change came when Bishop Hugh Donohue of Stockton testified at a hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor held in Delano on March 16, 1966 (the day before the march to Sacramento began). Speaking to Robert Kennedy and his colleagues on the subcommittee, Donohue reported that California’s Catholic bishops supported legislation that would extend the protections of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) to farmworkers, who had been excluded from the NLRA in 1935. Donohue framed the “farm labor problem” in general as a “moral problem,” but he carefully avoided speaking about the Delano strike itself.²¹⁶

By the time Chavez undertook his first public fast two years later, Bishop Timothy Manning of Fresno had assigned Father Mark Day to minister to the farmworkers—but the institutional Church still had not taken a stand on the Delano strike. Thus when Salvador Alvarez visited Chavez on behalf of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and asked what he needed from the Church, Chavez had much to say. First, he provided a frame of reference. “Some years ago, when some of us were working with the Community Service Organization,” he began, “a small group of priests, Frs. McDonnell, McCullough, Duggan, and others, began to pinpoint attention on the terrible situation of the farmworkers.” When these priests became more outspoken, they were reassigned. Then “we began to run into the California Migrant Ministry in the camps and fields.” These Protestants ministered to farmworkers, and “it forced us to raise the question why our Church was not doing the same.” Chavez observed that the institutional Church had tremendous wealth, power, wisdom, and spiritual guidance. Yet the Church had not shared these gifts, and this had given many young Chicanos a reason to turn away and say “we don’t need the Church.” Chavez chastised those who had turned away—not only from the Church but also from the farmworkers who were unable to move the Church by themselves. But ultimately he called upon the institutional Church itself to offer “its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother.” Chavez wanted the Church to act, just as Father McDonnell had taught him to act. “We ask for deeds,” he said. “We ask for servanthood.” Within a matter of months, the farmworkers’ supporters within the Church leadership would begin to mobilize—and they would move the institutional Church toward action. This, Chavez later noted, was “the single most important thing that . . . helped us.”²¹⁷

Alvarez returned to the NCCB with Chavez’s statement in March 1968 and began building support. Chavez also followed up with a formal letter asking the NCCB to endorse the UFWOC strike and honor the union’s boycott of table grapes. Monsignor George Higgins—the longtime ally of Archbishop Lucey and Father Vizzard in the fight against the Bracero Program—took the lead in getting Chavez’s request on the agenda for the next NCCB meeting in November 1968. As historian Marco Prouty emphasizes, Higgins did not just want a statement from

²¹⁶ Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of César Chávez* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 46; Day, *Forty Acres*, 55; Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers*, 167; Bardacke, *Trampling*, 216.

²¹⁷ Chavez, “Mexican-American and the Church,” 215-18. Chavez quoted in Prouty, *César Chávez*, 3.

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the NCCB, “he wanted *action*.” He “wanted the Church to get off the sidelines and make a public stand supporting Chavez’s grape boycott.” The NCCB issued a statement affirming farmworkers’ civil rights and labor rights—the rights to organize, bargain collectively, and receive the equal protections of the National Labor Relations Act—but it stopped short of endorsing the boycott. The campaign thus continued, and it received help from George Meany, the Irish American Catholic and longtime president of the AFL-CIO. Meany was among the first to suggest, in April 1969, that “third party intervention with the grape growers could be of value in achieving a just peace in the grape fields.” The NCCB moved in this direction when it established the Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee on Farm Labor at its meeting in November 1969. The committee as a whole would be “the bridge” between farmworkers and growers, but three members would do most of the work: Bishop Joseph Donnelly of Hartford, Connecticut (the chair), Higgins, and Monsignor Roger Mahony of Fresno. As Prouty explains, they began their “crucial” work of bringing both sides together in February 1970. Within a matter of months, the mediators had generated substantial momentum through successful negotiations and contract agreements with growers beyond Delano. The last group of Delano area growers finally signed their own contracts in July 1970, ending the strike that began nearly five years earlier.²¹⁸

The crowning achievement of the farmworker movement—California’s Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA)—would come five years later, in June 1975. The union itself continued to mature in the early 1970s, figuring out how to administer its new contracts, gaining independent status in the AFL-CIO as the United Farm Workers of America (UFW), and establishing a new national headquarters in the mountains east of Bakersfield, California. At the same time, the union engaged in a new strike against lettuce growers in the Salinas Valley, a jurisdictional battle with the Teamsters, strikes against grape growers after their contracts expired in 1973, new boycotts of lettuce and table grapes, and other campaigns in the fields and courtrooms of California, Arizona, and Florida. Throughout these turbulent years, the Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee continued to play an important role, and Monsignor Higgins remained a steadfast ally of the union. Higgins learned that growers, Teamsters, and their allies were formidable opponents. (In April 1973 Higgins decided that he, Donnelly, and Mahony had “landed on the side of the angels.”) With renewed vigor, Higgins finally persuaded the NCCB to endorse the UFW’s lettuce and table grape boycotts in November 1973, leading to a boost in resources for the union as well as the first indications of support from the Vatican. Higgins, Donnelly, and Bishop James Rausch (general secretary of the NCCB) responded to a letter from the Vatican’s secretary of state with a formal request that Chavez receive an audience with the pope. Chavez’s meeting with Pope Paul VI in September 1974 was a moving personal experience, but it also generated a statement from the pope supporting Chavez’s “sustained effort to apply the principles of Christian social teaching” to the situation farmworkers faced in the U.S. Momentum from this meeting carried into the following year, which also saw a former Jesuit seminarian, Edmund “Jerry” Brown, enter the California governor’s office. Higgins, Mahony, and the broader coalition of supporters that surrounded La Causa worked with Brown to pass the ALRA, which promised a legal framework for secret ballot elections, contract negotiations, and the resolution of conflicts—all of the protections that the NLRA gave to most other American workers four decades earlier. Soon after signing the law, Brown created an Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) to implement it. He asked Mahony (newly elevated to bishop) to serve as the first chair.²¹⁹

In the years to come, Chavez and the UFW leadership would realize that the ALRA alone was not the answer to their problems. As the California Conference of Catholic Bishops had warned, “the mere signing of legislation . . . [would] not guarantee an end to all the anguish and strife.” The ALRA had to be enforced, the ALRB had to be supported, and the work of the ALRB staff had to be adequately funded. Still, in 1975, the ALRA seemed to be a remarkable achievement and a significant response to the forty-year injustice that denied farmworkers the

²¹⁸ Alvarez, interview; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 304-25; Prouty, *César Chávez*, 48-66; Day, *Forty Acres*, 140-68.

²¹⁹ Rast, et al., *Cesar Chavez*, 251-61; Prouty, *César Chávez*, 67-123; Levy, *Cesar Chavez*, 525-26. Higgins quoted in Prouty, *César Chávez*, 93. Pope Paul VI quoted in Prouty, *César Chávez*, 110.

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same rights and protections enjoyed by other American workers. The American Catholic Church played an important role in securing this legislation. As Marco Prouty argues, the Church's broader participation in the farmworker movement was perhaps its "greatest contribution to the cause of social justice [in the U.S.] during the final half of the twentieth century." Prouty notes that Chavez gave abundant credit for this contribution to "the labor priest," George Higgins. "I doubt that anybody has done as much for us as Msgr. Higgins," Chavez observed. But Prouty also makes an important point: "It could also be said that few laymen had done as much to transform the Church's pronouncements of social justice into action as Chavez." Ultimately, Prouty emphasizes, the Catholic clergy and La Causa "became a team."²²⁰

The "teamwork" that Prouty has documented reflected the impact of the Second Vatican Council. It also reflected an intertwining of Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism that began during the 1950s, lasted through the 1960s, and carried into the 1970s. This intertwining helped drive the early Latinization of the American Catholic Church—a development that can be understood by considering how the institutional Church increased its efforts to engage ethnic Mexican and other Latino Catholics, on the one hand, and how Latino Catholics continued their own engagement with the Church, on the other.

During the 1920s and 1930s, ethnic Mexican Catholics in the U.S. were marginalized within the institutional Church. Their numbers were growing, and many Catholic officials, particularly in the American West, framed this as a "problem." The relationship between ethnic Mexicans and the Church began to change during the 1940s and 1950s through the work of the Catholic leaders such as Archbishop Robert Lucey and Archbishop John Mitty and their initiatives—the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking and the Spanish Mission Band. During the 1960s and 1970s the Church moved toward an even more respectful, empathetic, and even celebratory engagement with ethnic Mexicans and other Latinos. By 1983 (amidst early debates over legislation that became known as the Immigration Reform and Control Act) the NCCB was moved to "recognize the Hispanic community among us as a blessing from God." This changing sentiment brought with it increased efforts to recruit, train, and ordain Latino priests and deacons and increased efforts to secure the appointments of Latino bishops—beginning in 1970 with Patrick Flores of Texas, the first Mexican American to be appointed to the position of bishop. In California, the Archdiocese of San Francisco placed a particular emphasis on the ordination of Latino deacons, and Father Anthony Soto and Father Reynaldo Flores emerged as leaders in this effort. Historian Jeffrey Burns notes that this changing sentiment toward ethnic Mexicans and other Latinos brought increased efforts to empower Latino members of the laity by sanctioning and supporting the *Cursillo* movement but also by recruiting Latino Catholics into positions of authority "in chanceries, on parish councils, within religious orders, and in other Catholic institutions." As historian Timothy Matovina explains, this changing sentiment also produced a series of national conferences between 1972 and 1985 and the production of a pastoral plan for Latino ministry. Adopted by the NCCB in 1987, the pastoral plan emphasized several enduring goals: inclusivity, the empowerment of Latino laity, the cultivation of Latino leadership, and the promotion of social justice.²²¹

Latino Catholic engagement with the institutional Church, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, was inspired in no small part by Cesar Chavez and the visibility of Catholicism within the farmworker movement. Some of that engagement was openly critical of the Church. In 1969, for example, Chicano activists in Los Angeles formed a group they called "Católicos Por La Raza." One of the founders, Richard Cruz, later explained that he decided to help form such a group after talking with Chavez about the lack of support from the institutional Church for the farmworker movement. Two years later, Father Anthony Soto and other members of the

²²⁰ Prouty, *César Chávez*, 22, 58. California Conference of Catholic Bishops quoted in Prouty, *César Chávez*, 119. Chavez quoted in Prouty, *César Chávez*, 22.

²²¹ "First Married Deacon Program in San Jose," *The Monitor*, March 1, 1973; Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 232-33; Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 76-86. NCSS quoted in Burns, "Mexican Catholic Community," 233.

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“Chicano Priests Organization” of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, drawing similar inspiration from Chavez’s March 1968 statement, called upon the Church to allocate more resources to fight poverty. “We don’t ask for more Cathedrals,” Chavez had said to Salvador Alvarez. “We ask for the Church to sacrifice with the people.” In that spirit, and in alignment with other new organizations such as PADRES (Priests Associated for Religious, Educational, and Social Rights), the Chicano priests dedicated their organization “not to building up larger and more beautiful churches,” but to strengthening “a living Church—the people—especially the poor.” They asked the Church leadership to do the same. More generally, the inspiration that Latino Catholics drew from Chavez was less political and more spiritual—but it was no less activist. It was a spirituality that was informed by a mandate to “go out and do things,” to refrain from criticism of others, perhaps, and simply take action. “That’s what I think is a real faith,” Chavez once explained to an interviewer, “and that’s what I think Christ really taught us: to go do something . . . clothe the naked, feed the hungry . . . give water to the thirsty.” It was this inspiration that led historian Mario García to call Chavez “one of the great figures in the history of the United States in the twentieth century and . . . one of its great spiritual figures.”²²²

The Latinization of the American Catholic Church—a product of intertwining of Mexican American civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholicism—continued through the closing decades of the twentieth century and into the opening decades of the twenty-first. As it continued, it helped shape modern American Latino identity. In 1990 approximately 75 percent of American Latinos identified as Catholic. By 2010 the percentage had fallen to somewhere between 60 and 70 percent (with Latino Protestants remaining near 20 percent and Latinos who claimed no religious affiliation increasing to 10 percent). Yet even though the proportion of Latino Catholics fell, the overall number nearly doubled because of the phenomenal growth of the American Latino population. As Mario García noted in 2008, Latino Catholic engagement with the Church, “along with the profound demographic changes among American Catholics,” had “clearly led to the Latinization of the Church. . . . Already close to half of all American Catholics are of Latino descent,” he observed. “This number will only continue to soar because of high natural birthrates and continued immigration patterns.” García’s scholarship has demonstrated, just as the history surrounding Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel demonstrates, that “the roots of such Latinization go deeper into history and are more complicated than some contemporary critics suggest.” Yet those deep roots—and the rich, complicated history embodied in properties such as Guadalupe Mission Chapel—are an inheritance that all Latino Catholics, all American Latinos, and, indeed, all Americans should treasure and protect.²²³

COMPARABLE PROPERTIES

The *Cesar Chavez, Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* (2013) identified 1952 to 1962 as a distinct phase in the productive career of Cesar Chavez. Properties that would be comparable to Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall) would be those associated with this phase of Chavez’s productive career and with the convergence of Latino civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholic ministry during the early Cold War era.

The *Special Resource Study* identified Guadalupe Mission Chapel and eighteen other properties associated with the 1952-1962 phase in Chavez’s productive career. Six of these other properties also have some degree of broader association with Latino civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and/or Catholic ministry.²²⁴

²²² García, *Católicos*, 132-42; “Statement of Concern Submitted by the Chicano Priests Organization” (April 1971), copy in parish scrapbook, OLGP; García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 1. Chavez quoted in García, ed., *Gospel of César Chávez*, 32.

²²³ Matovina, “Endurance and Transformation, 131; García, *Católicos*, 128-29.

²²⁴ *Cesar Chavez, Special Resource Study*, 43-48.

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Of the eighteen properties, three are now non-extant.

Three of the properties are former Chavez family residences in San Jose, Oxnard, and Los Angeles. These properties have the potential to offer insight into Chavez's family life, the support he received from Helen and his children, and the personal sacrifices they made, but these properties have low integrity and low association with Chavez's own productive career.

Five other properties also have low integrity and low association with Chavez's productive career. These include, for example, the Hotel De Anza in Calexico, California, where Chavez announced his resignation from the CSO in 1962 and the American Legion Hall in Delano, California, where he convened an organizational meeting for the Farm Workers Association.

Six properties have moderate association with Chavez's productive career and some degree of broader association with Latino civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and/or Catholic ministry during the Cold War era. These sites include the former CSO office on East Santa Clara Street in San Jose, two former CSO office locations in Oxnard, the former Farm Placement Service headquarters in Ventura, and two former CSO office locations in Los Angeles. Compared to these six properties, Guadalupe Mission Chapel retains a higher degree of integrity and much greater interpretive potential.

The eighteenth property, St. Mary's Catholic Church in Stockton, California, merits separate consideration. The *Special Resource Study* associated this building with the 1952-1962 phase in Chavez's productive career because these years also saw the emergence of Dolores Huerta as a community organizer, civil rights leader, and labor rights leader. The building has minimal association with Chavez, but it has a strong association with the beginning of Huerta's productive career; it has a clear association with Latino (and Filipino) civil rights advocacy, labor rights advocacy, and Catholic ministry; and it retains a moderate if not high degree of integrity.

Since the completion of the *Special Resource Study*, the LA Conservancy has restored a building on 1st Avenue known as the Boyle Heights City Hall. This building served as a CSO office location in Los Angeles and merits consideration for its association with Chavez's productive career between 1959 and 1962 and with Latino civil rights and labor rights advocacy. The building seems to have retained a moderate if not high degree of integrity.

No other comparable properties have been identified.

EXCEPTION 1

Guadalupe Mission Chapel qualifies for NHL designation under NHL Criteria Exception 1 (a property owned by a religious institution) because it derives its primary national historical significance from its historical functions and associations.

The chapel building provided space for functions that were religious in nature, of course, but at separate times it also provided space for functions that were not religious in nature (such as the activities of the CSO). The space was dynamic because it was multifunctional. Thus it encouraged Cesar Chavez to weave together lessons about Catholic social doctrine he learned from Father Donald McDonnell with lessons about community organizing he learned from CSO organizer Fred Ross. More broadly, the building provided space for an intertwining of Mexican American civil rights advocacy, Catholic ministry to ethnic Mexicans, and ongoing efforts to organize ethnic Mexican farmworkers.

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EXCEPTION 2

Guadalupe Mission Chapel qualifies for NHL designation under NHL Criteria Exception 2 (a building that has been moved from its original location). The building was moved 450 feet northwest within the current parish's property and rotated 180 degrees in 1974-1975.

Despite this modest change in location, the building qualifies for designation because it is the property most closely and most importantly associated with the first phase of Cesar Chavez's productive career as a community organizer, civil rights leader, and labor rights leader. The *Cesar Chavez Special Resource Study* identified 1952 to 1962 as a distinct phase in Chavez's productive career. Of the nineteen properties associated with this phase, the chapel building retains the highest degree of integrity.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):
 - Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Menlo Park, California (for pre-1962 documentation)
 - Diocese of San Jose Archives and Records, San Jose, California (for post-1962 documentation)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

Latitude: 37.352569

Longitude: -121.844639

Verbal Boundary Description: Property boundaries are indicated on accompanying base map (labeled Map 2).

Boundary Justification: Property boundaries encompass the building and its foundation.

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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM
August 9, 2016

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE MISSION CHAPEL (MCDONNELL HALL)**Images**

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Photograph Log

- Photograph 1.** Historic (1953) exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: unknown, 1953. View from the southwest. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.)
- Photograph 2.** Current exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the northeast)
- Photograph 3.** Current exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the southeast)
- Photograph 4.** Current exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the west.)
- Photograph 5.** Historic (1953) view of the nave and chancel of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall.) (Photographer unknown, 1953. View from the south. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.)
- Photograph 6.** Current interior view of the former nave of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the north.)
- Photograph 7.** Representative current view of historic (1953) interior ceiling and light fixture fabric above the current. (1975) drop ceiling in the former nave of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016)
- Photograph 8.** Current view of original (1923) window framing and trim located on interior rear wall of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the northeast.)

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Photograph 1. Historic (1953) exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: unknown, 1953. View from the southwest. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.)



Photograph 2. Current exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the northeast)

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Photograph 3. Current exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the southeast)



Photograph 4. Current exterior view of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the west.)

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Photograph 5. Historic (1953) view of the nave and chancel of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall.) (Photographer unknown, 1953. View from the south. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.)



Photograph 6. Current interior view of the former nave of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the north.)

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Photograph 7. Representative current view of historic (1953) interior ceiling and light fixture fabric above the current (1975) drop ceiling in the former nave of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016)



Photograph 8. Current view of original (1923) window framing and trim located on interior rear wall of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Photographer: Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016. View from the northeast.)

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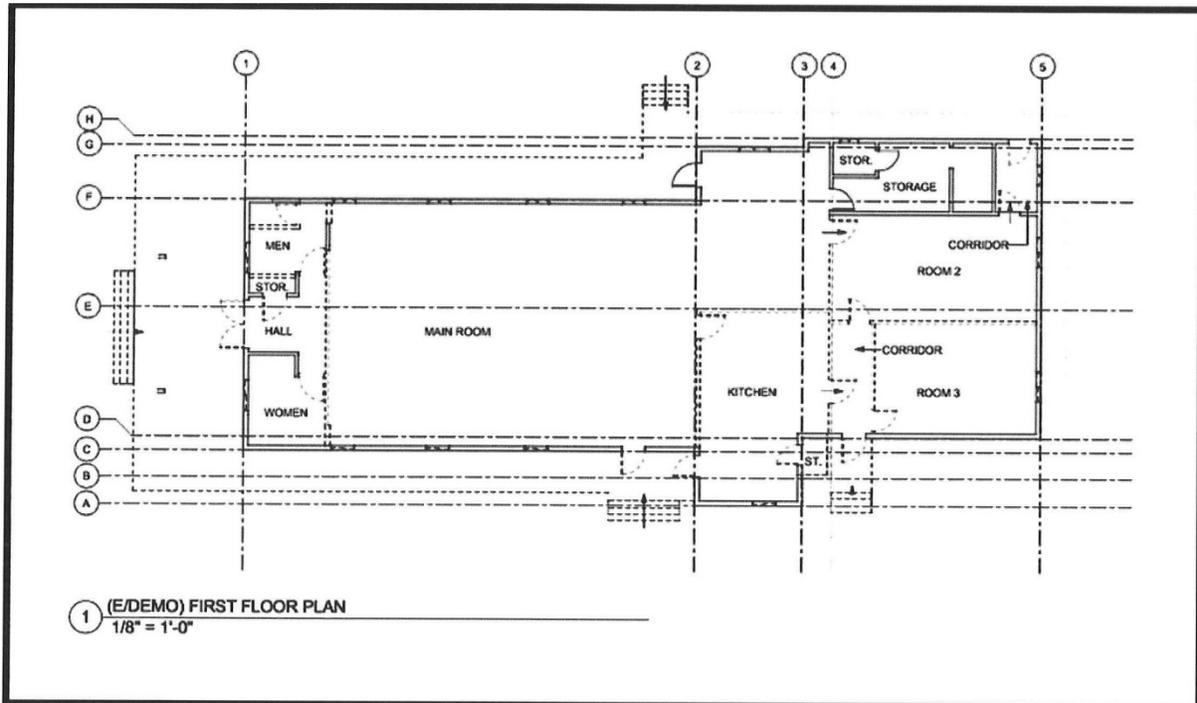


Figure 1. Current interior floor plan of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (McDonnell Hall). (Prepared by Garavaglia Architecture, Inc., 2016.)

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (1953-1960)

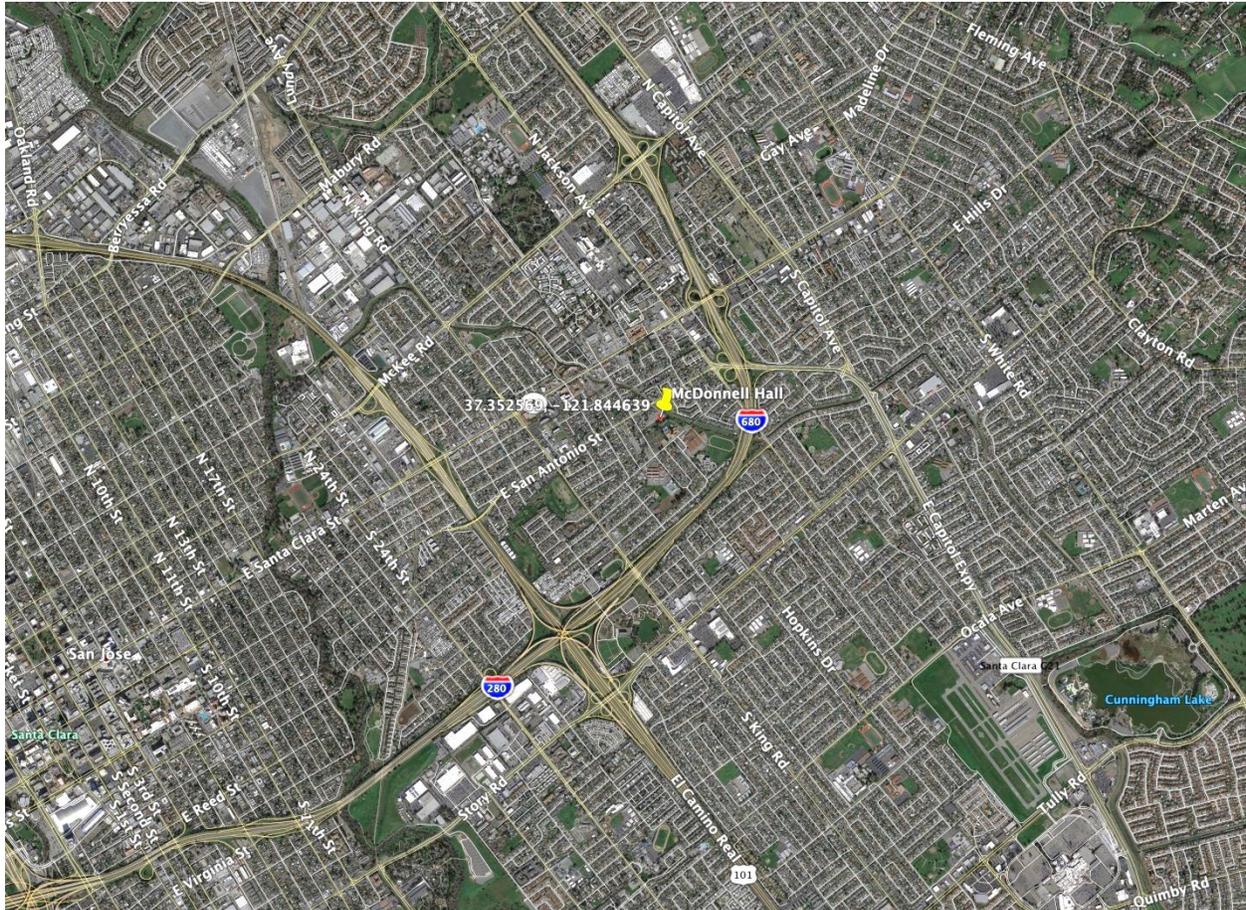
Maps

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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Location Map 1.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (aka McDonnell Hall)
2020 East San Antonio Street, Santa Clara County, San Jose, California 95116



Latitude/Longitude Coordinates – WGS84: 37.352569/-121.844.639

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (1953-1960)

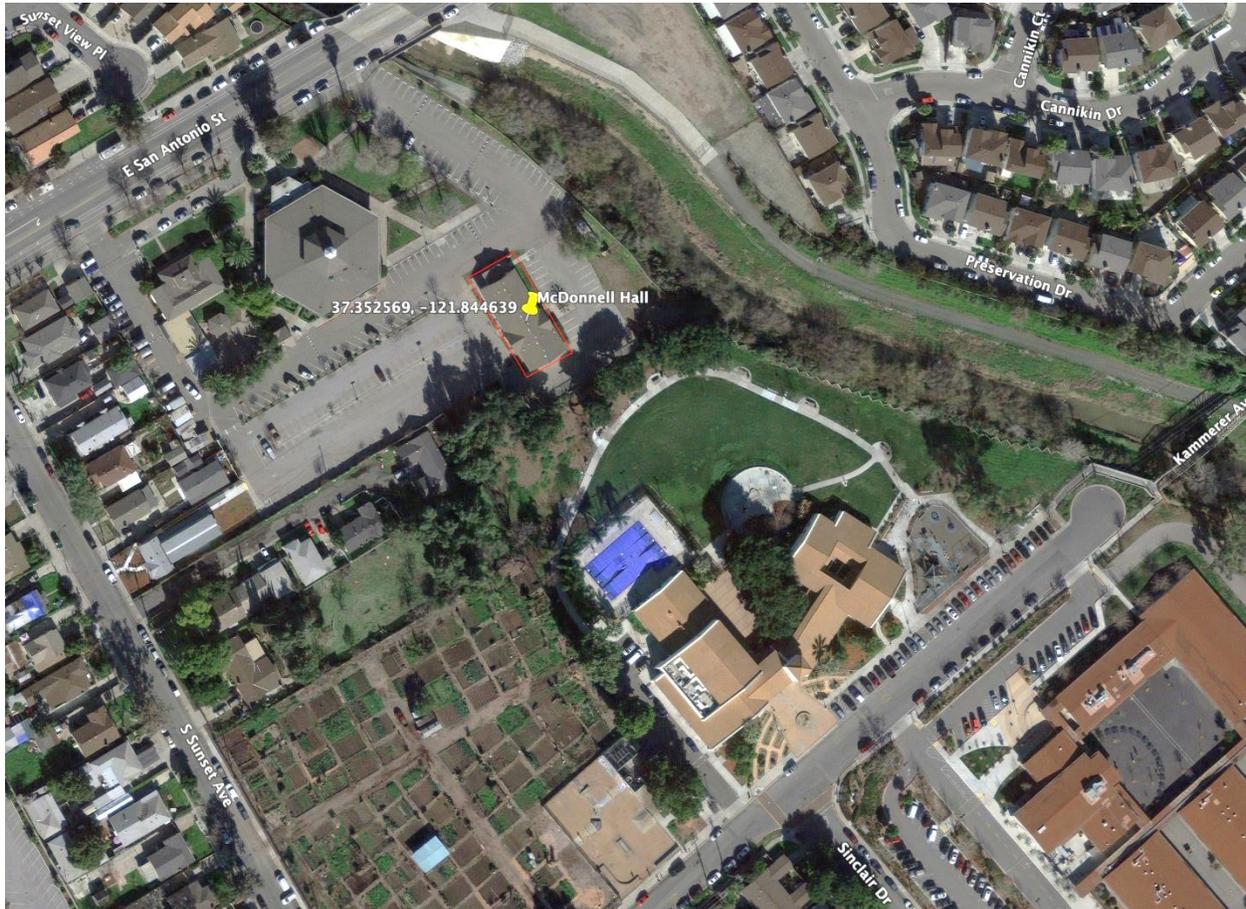
Maps

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Location Map 2.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Chapel (aka McDonnell Hall)
2020 East San Antonio Street, Santa Clara County, San Jose, California 95116



Latitude/Longitude Coordinates – WGS84: 37.352569/-121.844.639