

I think I was called to the churches in practically every small rural area because especially the women, the wives of the growers, wanted to see me personally and find out what was going on. Sometimes I'd go into a small community church, and everybody would be so tense. It would seem like everybody had a rifle in their hands and was ready to go to war. But when I finished talking to them, some of them would cry and say, "We didn't know." They'd come and hug us and say, "We're glad that we heard it from you." It seemed like each place I left, I left a sister behind.

But one time I was in a church meeting, and this woman came up and said, "I want you to know there are Ku Klux Klan members in this community, and I've been told to tell you to lay off because they're going to pay you a visit."

I said, "What do you mean?"

She said, "They're very upset with what you're doing."

I didn't know what the Klan was, so I said, "Well, tell them if they want to pay me a visit, fine. I'd be glad to talk with them." I wasn't scared until afterwards when I found out about the Klan. I learned they were from Paxton, Illinois, and belonged to one of the churches.

Finally, Olga helped us work it out so we became part of the United Farm Workers with César Chávez. Pablo and I had a little bit of land that we gave, and the Illinois Farm Worker Ministry donated a trailer, and we started the first Farm Worker Service Center in the Midwest. On October 25, 1981, César Chávez came from California, and we had a wonderful ceremony to dedicate it. We had a mass and a rally and hundreds of people. We had banners that said, "Viva César Chávez," "Boycott Purina Pet Foods," and all sorts of things. César spoke in Spanish and English, and it was wonderful.

The César gave the microphone to me, and I said, "Brothers and sisters, we have rights and we must fight for those rights, and we need to let people know what kind of lives we live, what is happening." Then I said, "It is better to die on your feet and not to live on your knees for the rest of your life." It was the biggest moment of my life, like climbing Mount Everest and sticking the flag with a black eagle on top of it.

The woman cooked tamales all night and during the day, so after the rally, everyone ate, and we had music and danced. So, in that way, Pablo and I became organizers for the United Farm Workers.