



I already had made a couple of phone calls to Emmanuel, a contractor who had picked up Marvin and Edwin at the work link center, but then had failed to pay them for a week's work. He promised them and me over the phone, several times, that he would pay them. "*Come and see,*" the workers told me, and though I had other places to be, I drove them to the house still under renovation in Jamaica, Queens. There I saw where the old wall was removed; I touched the newly poured foundation myself. I also walked the length of the excavated entryway to the front of the house where they had built a new block wall and using the debris and excavated soil, had prepared the foundation of a future concrete front porch.

"*Come and see,* was Emmanuel, God-with-us' answer when the first disciples finally noticed that God was calling them. They had other plans I'm sure. Strangely enough, God's Call brought me to this contractor of the same name who owes them \$1500. Marvin and Edwin beamed showing me their handiwork wrought in dirty conditions. I talked with a couple of African American laborers on the site who claimed to be owed money as well. The animosity between the two communities is well known. Whom do you trust?

I talked with a woman who lives next door where the purported owner of the house under renovation lives, but there were no answers to be had there. She said that he wasn't home and didn't expect him any time soon. I recorded the numbers on the building permits, license plates, telephone, thinking I might be able to report him to the city. But in our drive back to Freeport, I understood why he had picked up Spanish-speaking workers out in Freeport. Cat and mouse games don't work well long distance.

The problem is these men from the mountains of Honduras just love to work, take pride in it, and once they start, want to complete it. They spend so much time idle waiting for work that their bodies crave the activity. "Why did you keep working after he didn't pay you the first time?" I asked them. They were so close that they could taste it. Paying them for a couple of days and then a promise of more tomorrow kept them coming the whole next week to finish it, even though they had to bring their own lunch and pay the bus fare both ways. And now both of them are looking at imminent eviction from their rooms because they lack the funds to stay there.



I wish I were a lawyer sometimes. The local Worker's Rights organization will help them pursue a small claims court action, if they can get a ride there some evening. The buses aren't safe at night. But how do you serve papers on someone who knows how to effectively evade you? We still don't have Emmanuel's last name. I'd like to stand in front of the house and read from Exodus 22 till he shows up: *you shall not wrong or oppress the resident aliens among you, for you too were aliens once in Egypt.* Day laborers, cut off from protection, know better than to demonstrate. I'll just have to let it go now and get back to my other ministry in Patchogue. *Come and see* means somehow trusting the Father's Will, letting go of all you know, and sharing in the death and resurrection that occurs in a couple of brothers like Marvin and Edwin. It all happens in God's time.

Written March 24, 2009 by Tom McNamara, O.F.M., Cap.

