

Scriptural reflections, linked as devotions with the suffering steps of refugees & immigrants.

Forced Migration—The Dangerous Journey

Scripture: *I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink, the people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise. (Isaiah 43:20b-21)*

Reflection: No one leaves home easily. No one says goodbye to family and friends without regret. No one embarks on a dangerous desert journey without fear. Surely the people of Israel, God’s own chosen ones, knew fear and doubt, even regret, as God led them through the desert from bondage to freedom.

Today, violence, lawlessness, and political unrest in Mexico and Central America are literally pushing people to migrate and the militarization of the US border is forcing them to undertake a journey that is increasingly perilous. The almost 400 miles of Arizona’s border with Mexico cuts across 100,000 square miles of bone dry Sonora desert—beastly hot during the day and freezing cold at night. It’s filled with prickly pear, ocotillo, and buckhorn cholla cactus and populated by rattlesnakes and scorpions.

Desperate migrants pay thousands of dollars to the Sinaloa Cartel’s coyotes to get them across the border and guide them through the desert, often by cell phone. Since 2001, more than 2,100 migrants have perished in that desert trying to make it to their own promised land. And the death toll keeps rising as increased border enforcement and the extension of the border fence force migrants to take more dangerous routes through ever more treacherous terrains. More than 130 bodies were recovered along migrant routes in Southern Arizona in 2015, an increase over the 2014 death toll of 108.



Our faith compels us to seek to reduce the violence and corruption that force people to flee their homes. Our common values require that we seek to change the circumstances that require mothers and fathers to leave their homes in order to provide for their children. Simple humanity demands that we seek to stop the deaths in the desert.

Story: On Sunday morning we rose early and drove to Naco, Arizona where we walked across the border into its sister city in Sonora. There we met our Mexican partners Ismael and Mari Elena. They had already filled the 300-gallon water tank that took up most of the bed of the white pickup flying a blue flag and clearly marked “Agua Para Vida”. There was room for two in the cab with Mari Elena. The other three of us joined Ismael and Mari Elena’s son in the back; folding ourselves around the agua para vida.

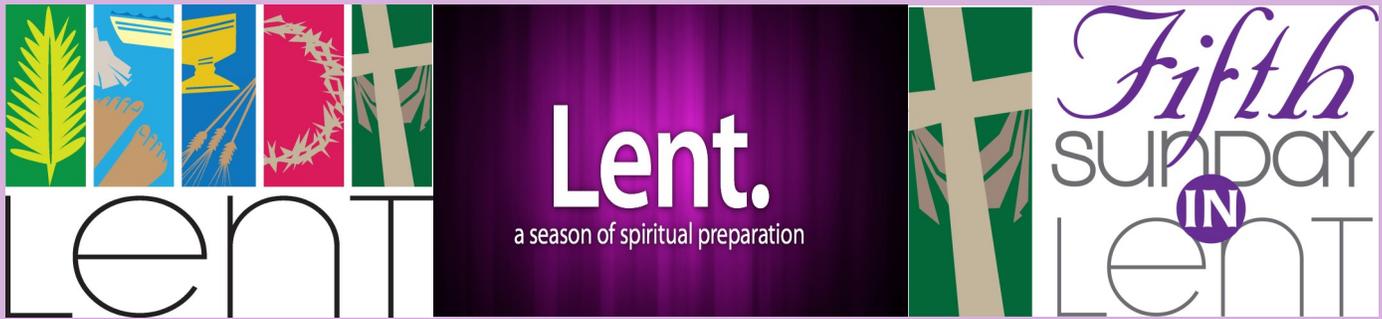
We headed out to our first stop not far from town and topped off the blue 55-gallon drum. From there we made our way to the border on foot over rugged terrain carrying food and water to share with anyone we might meet along the way. Ismael had heard rumors about a border crossing planned for later that day and we found clear signs that migrants had been in the area recently. As we walked along the 4-meter high metal border-wall that slices through the desert we saw the bits and pieces of the lives of those who were quite literally running for theirs. Under scrub trees and thorny bushes, we found toothbrushes and combs; discarded coats and backpacks; and shoes that had fallen apart along the way. We saw hundreds of empty water bottles and scores of used phone cards—life lines for migrants trying to survive the difficult and dangerous journey though the desert.



We didn’t meet any migrants that day. We did fill three more 55-gallon drums that could provide life-saving water to those fleeing violence and poverty in Mexico or the Northern Triangle of Central America. We prayed for all those on the journey, asking our loving God to keep them safe from hunger and thirst and harm as they made their own exodus through the desert.

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Written by Sister Ann Scholz, LCWR. For questions about this resource, contact ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org.



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Action/Resources:

- Call upon Congress and the Administration to address the root causes of forced migration.
- Invest in local violence-prevention and development efforts including education and job creation plans, and empowerment programs for women and girls.
- Address the unintended consequences of US foreign and trade policies that contribute to rising violence and poverty in the region.
- End support for governments that engage in human rights violations.
- Fix the broken US immigration system that continues to separate families and threaten migrants and refugees.

Learn more about those who accompany migrants along their journey.

No More Deaths is a coalition of community and faith groups dedicated to stepping up efforts to stop deaths of migrants in the desert and to achieving immigration reform. See www.nomoredeaths.org

Humane Borders offers humanitarian assistance to those in need through the deployment of emergency water stations on routes known to be used by migrants coming north through the desert. See www.humaneborders.org

Frontera de Cristo is a Presbyterian border ministry located in the sister cities of Agua Prieta, Sonora, & Douglas, AZ. See www.fronteradecristo.org

Tucson Samaritans is an organization comprised of people of conscience and faith who render humanitarian aid to migrants in distress in the Tucson Sector of the Arizona/Mexico border. It is a mission of Southside Presbyterian Church. See www.tucsonamaritans.org

Prayer:

God of Goodness, we come to you humbled by the truth of our lives. We have been busy about so many things, that we have neglected to show concern and tenderness towards our struggling immigrant brothers and sisters. We have not dared to speak when they have been unjustly treated, we've not cared about their perilous journey to this country nor their heartbreak at having to flee from terror and violence only to be met by fear, suspicion, and detention.

Give us your eyes to see and ears to hear the immigrants' cries to belong. Give us hearts open to welcome and to accept the gifts that they are. Grant us the ability to forgive ourselves and to ask for reconciliation from the One who gave His life so that all of us might live fully. AMEN.



Written by IIC Partners. For questions about this resource, contact ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org.