

***Immigration Part IV:***  
***Update from the border at Nogales, Mexico,***  
***visited while on retreat: Saturday, November 10, 2007:***  
***The Rev. John F. Carter***



**NO MAS MUERTES**

Maria Adams and I stop at a supermarket deli in Tucson to buy two kinds of cheese, bologna, rolls, bread and mayo. We drive to Nogales, a trip we had made with another volunteer for *No Mas Muertes* (No More Deaths) six months earlier. We park on the American side of the border with Mexico and again easily cross over. So far this year, over 250 migrants have died in the desert or in the rugged mountains of Arizona, attempting to cross into the United States. *No Mas Muertes* (NMM) does what it can to prevent those deaths and alleviate other forms of suffering through humanitarian aid.

For millennia, deserts have been considered holy places of revelation and spiritual cleansing. John the Baptist, Jesus and early Christian mystics retreated to the desert for encounters with God and self. The deserts in Arizona are beautiful to walk in for a few hours. After that they can become a truly formidable and even deadly environment. The NMM site in Nogales is named *Mariposa* after a nearby street. *Mariposa* means butterfly in Spanish, and in Christian iconology, represents joyous resurrection. This name is a sign of hope and comfort to those who come heavy laden. (For more information about *Mariposa* please read previous recent issues of the Parish Newsletter.)

Maria and I have no problem crossing into Mexico. There is a lot of activity; cars, trucks, Border Patrol personnel and vehicles, and recently arrived deportees. We greet our acquaintances at Mariposa and set to making sandwiches. Then we wait and chat with staff, including Antonio, Gilberto and Rafael.

A deportee in his 30s, recently returned by the Border Patrol, staggers into the shelter. He is quite sick. He describes a hellacious journey in the desert, a nearly fatal nightmare. A “coyote” – a paid guide for would-be border-crossers - had dropped him off inside the US border and pointed the way North, telling him he would find water and help after a three-hour walk. Lies. “Coyotes” prey upon the dreams and innocence of their victim/clients. They take no real risks themselves, except for the lowest workers in a hierarchy now operated by a Mafiosi organization that also traffics in drugs. Someone once said if you want to create criminals make something illegal (e.g. Prohibition.)

This man at first refuses food. He had trusted and followed the coyote's instructions. He walked for two days and nights in the desert but found no water, no help. If he had not been arrested he might have died. He says he will never go back across

Another man I talk with comes from Chiapas, one of the poorest states in Mexico, hit very hard by NAFTA. I anoint him with healing oil. He sits and rests after taking some nourishment. His eyes are bloodshot. He was in a group with some other men from Chiapas. He pulls something out of his pocket, something precious that crossed the border with him both ways. He smooths and rubs the desert dust off a round amulet. I think he wants to show it to me. I draw closer to see a photo of his three-month-old son, smiling beautifully, on one side. He turns it over and there is another picture of his lovely wife and their daughter. I admire his family and say they will be happy to see him.

Then comes a woman named Lillian. Lillian has just been dropped off by the Border Patrol. She is stunned and troubled. She was stopped in Tucson by the police for a minor traffic violation just 24 hours ago. She has lived there for ten years. She has four children, three of them born in the US, and therefore U.S. citizens. It may well be that she is still nursing her youngest child, who is just three months old. Her mother is back in Tucson. Because Lillian crossed the border illegally ten years ago she has no “papers.” She is undocumented. Her three older children attend school in Tucson. What are their thoughts and fears at this time, when their mother is with them one day and whisked away the next?

Lillian says the police who picked her up were fine, but the Border Patrol, with one exception, was rough and menacing. Having now a migraine headache, she gets up and goes to the Red Cross trailer to get some assistance. Antonio, who is the director of NMM, is doing all he can to arrange transportation for her to Douglas, another border town. Lillian does not know what she will do yet. She has not yet talked with her mother or her children. Considering the gravity of the personal crisis she is in, she is navigating fairly well. But her options are not good. If she crosses the border back into the US and gets picked up again, she will probably be put in jail. Her story is not unusual.

On the way back through the checkpoint to the US side, a guard greets Maria and me in Spanish. He asks for our IDs, and we give him our licenses. He wants to know what brings me here from Connecticut, walking around Mexico and Arizona. I tell him we have just been volunteering at No Mas Muertes. Referring to Maria, who has been a US citizen for 15 years, he asks me, "Do you know her?"

I reply, "Yes, and she knows me."  
I'm not sure he gets my point, but he wishes us good luck.

John+