



Pope Francis Visits the Border of El Paso, Texas – Juarez, Mexico

By Jane Remson O.Carm.



Pope Francis with the children living in the border.

From 1965 to 2015, more than sixteen million Mexicans entered the U.S. Today Mexico is less an exporter of migrants than the highway through which hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans travel north. “Here in Juarez, as in other border areas, there are thousands of immigrants from Central America and other countries, not forgetting the many Mexicans who also seek to pass over to the other side... Each step, a journey laden with grave injustices; the enslaved, the imprisoned and extorted, so many of these brothers and sisters of ours are the consequence of a trade in human beings,” said Pope Francis.



While visiting the southern border, Pope Francis spoke with workers and business owners and exhorted them to call for ethical business practices and lamented that “the prevailing mentality advocates for the greatest possible profits, immediately and at any cost.” He added, “The

flow of capital cannot decide the flow and life of people.”

During his homily at the Mass Pope Francis celebrated at the border he said, “The human tragedy that is forced migration is a global phenomenon today. This crisis, which can be measured in numbers and statistics, we want instead to measure with names, stories, families.”

President Donald Trump’s zero-tolerance immigration policy, would allow U.S. authorities to criminally prosecute all immigrants caught crossing the Mexican border illegally. Parents will be held in jail while their children are sent to government shelters. Videos of children held in concrete-floored shelters and an audio of wailing children caused an outcry of this policy in the U.S. and was condemned abroad. Pope Francis called the separation of children from their parents, “contrary to our Catholic values and immoral.” What are our Catholic values and morals? “The Church is called to remind everyone that it is not simply a matter of social or migration questions but of human persons, of our brothers and sisters who today are a symbol of all those discarded by the globalized society,” Pope Francis said.

Building on the Gospel message, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” – Mark 12:31, Pope Francis gives us a realistic picture of the experience of immigrants and

society when he said, “At times they (immigrants) upset the cultural and social horizons which they encounter. Increasingly, the victims of violence and poverty, leaving their homelands, are exploited by human traffickers during their journey towards the dream of a better future. If they survive the abuses and hardships of the journey, they then have to face latent suspicions and fear. In the end, they frequently encounter a lack of clear and practical policies regulating the acceptance of migrants and providing for short or long term programs of integration respectful of the right and duties of all. Today, more than in the past, the Gospel of mercy troubles our consciences, prevents us from taking the suffering of others for granted, and points out way of responding which, grounded in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, find practical expression in works of spiritual and corporal mercy.”

Even though immigration is a controversial issue, there is no doubt that we must talk about it. “It’s (immigration) a difficult issue, especially because a lot of us, even people of faith, we come at it through our political lens. We may look at it as a left or right issue, as a conservative or liberal issue, a Democrat or Republican issue, but the Church tenet takes a little bit of a different prospective,” says Dylan Corbett, founding director of Hope Border Institute in El Paso, Texas.

What does the Church teach about immigration? “The Church starts with the reality of the person, the Church puts the person first. The Church also looks at this through a tradition which goes back thousands of years. We are, in many ways, an immigrant Church ... The Old Testament is very clear about how we ought to treat the stranger and our forefathers in faith, the Jews, they experienced the realities of migration, “ explained Corbett.



The three basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching on immigration are; (1) people have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families, (2) a country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration, and (3) a country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2241 states: “The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search

of the security and the means of livelihood which one cannot find in one’s country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive them.

Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants’ duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.”

Scripture tells us that God promises that our judgment will be based on our treatment of the most vulnerable. Before God we cannot excuse inhumane treatment of certain persons by claiming that their lack of legal status deprives them of right given by the Creator.



Mass celebrated at the USA/Mexico border

The United Nations is the only global forum open to all peoples to work for consensus standards for a more just, humane, and peaceful world. The United Nations is the only world body that structural injustices can be addressed, exposed and work to alleviate.

After World War II, the United Nation created in 1948 *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The thirty rights that are contained in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* protect the human needs and basic rights of all peoples.

Articles 13, 14, and 15 of the Declaration state the basic rights of everyone including immigrants.

Article 13:

- #1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.
- #2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to one’s country.

Article 14:

- #1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- #2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecution genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15:

#1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.

#2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of one's nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

I encourage you to spend time examining your values on migration. For a guidance you have the immigration policies of your individual country, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted by the United Nation, the teaching of the Church that are based on Holy Scripture, and the teaching of the Popes.

LIFE AT THE BORDER OF EL PASO, TEXAS -JUAREZ, MEXICO

By. Peter Hinde O.Carm.

I first became involved with the southern Texas-Mexico border while passing thru in solidarity ministry with Latin American countries in the 1970s. There was no discernible flow of refugees entering the U.S. until 1980 when refugees from the war in El Salvador began to come. A dribble of refugees from Guatemala had begun in the 1960s and that grew to match the considerable flow of Salvadorans in the late 1980s.



From 1983 until 1995, I lived and worked in San Antonio, Texas with annual visits to Mexico and points south. I also assisted in San Antonio, Texas with refugee work with Salvadorans. In 1995, I moved with the Tabor House team – Betty Campbell and Tadeo Zywicki – to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico where I live and work assisting in refugee work there. We located there opposite El Paso, Texas to continue our solidarity work with Latin America.

In 1981, Ruben Garcia, a Catholic layman had founded a migrant ministry for undocumented migrants from El Salvador and Annunciation House in downtown El Paso, Texas. We collaborated with Ruben and took advantage of Annunciation House while we located a house in Juarez.

We soon learned the gross disparity of wages with U.S. industries working in Mexico. Gary MacEoin, a lawyer-journalist member our Tabor House (a Christian

contemplative community with option for the poor and for political action of solidarity with Latin American to challenge U.S. government-corporation's abusive power in that area), came to help us in a dialogue with managers of the maquila industry. Migration from the interior of Mexico had begun in the 1960s to the newly installed maquila industries that U.S. corporations set up all along the border to take advantage of cheap labor. By the 1990s in Juarez there were some 300 such assembly plants in this border "free trade zone."

Mercy Sister Kathleen Erickson began to bring delegations from U.S. to this border. This was an educational ministry taken up by others till multiple delegations were coming. Tabor House in Juarez became a regular stopping off place for these delegations, allowing us to continue our work of consciousness raising with U.S. citizens regarding U.S. imperial policies with Latin America, and specifically with Mexico. In just one year, we had 50 delegations stop with us at Tabor House.

Scalabrini Fathers with the diocese of Juarez set up in the late 1970s a ministry explicitly for migrants from Central America. Eight years later their *Casa Migrant* saw a changeover to the Dominicans Fathers who developed, besides the hospitality, an office of human rights for migrants. About 2009 when the violence in Juarez grew from one or two to ten to eleven murders a day. The Dominicans had to move, and the diocese itself took charge with Padre Javier Calvillo;



While the situation for migrants became extremely dangerous in Juarez, the U.S. Congress and Border policy became more hostile to migrants. Refugees fleeing the violent crime, aftermath of wars, and years of drought in Central America, swelled in numbers. Instead of sneaking across the border, migrants began to present themselves at points of entry and to Border Patrol asking for asylum.

By 2016 refugees from Africa, Haiti, Honduras, Salvador and Guatemala began to travel thru Mexico in caravans. Though the total numbers of refugees actually became less, the caravans designed for protection on the part of the migrants became a pretext for alarm and increased paranoia in the U.S. President Donald Trump distorted this situation, labeling the refugees as criminals, and as serving a plot to change U.S. white-

race dominance. He thus abetted the rising jingoism and white supremacy to 'justify' the gross expense for his project of a border wall and military support for border security.

The Border Patrol became more aggressive with refugees in a politics of exclusion. The death of two children due to neglect in custody of the Border Patrol caused outrage in the U.S., yet Homeland Security came up with no remedy for children separated from a parent, thousands of children became lost in the system.



In 2018 many refugees with children who were judged to have a credible fear for their life if returned to their country were released to Ruben Garcia in El Paso, Texas who had lined up 20 venues for them. Truly amazing was the ability of this system to give these people shelter, food, shower, a good night's sleep, clean clothes, belts, shoe-laces, phone contact with a relative in the U.S. for travel tickets the next day, and a ride to the airport or bus station. Seven hundred to one thousand people every day during the late winter and spring of 2019.

Other refugees, desperate for a hearing, slept on the bridge to El Paso, Texas for days and weeks on end in Juarez hoping for an opening. They were moved to *Casa Migrante* with their place in line guaranteed.

President Donald Trump ordered all Central Americans appealing for asylum to be returned to Mexico to wait their chance. About twelve other places of asylum were opened by Christian churches in Juarez to receive most, but not all the thousands returned to where they are vulnerable to kidnapping and extortion.

In Mexico, violence escalated again in several states in the summer of 2019 and Mexican families began to come in great numbers. They could not be persuaded to wait in the additional places opened in Juarez. They were families with one or two parents. People in Juarez like in El Paso responded to the need with tents, mattresses, clothes, food, and police protection. Months passed as only four or five families a week were permitted to pass for interviews.

Infants and children beginning to get sick with a cold as fall became winter; they were obliged to go to the new shelters set up for them. But then in 2019-20 President

Donald Trump gave an order that slowed that process practically to a stop with refugees returned to Mexico to wait there to be summoned for a hearing. This new order required that Central Americans be fast tracked on planes to Guatemala.

President Donald Trump had made an agreement with the government of Guatemala that the appeals for asylum of these people from Honduras or El Salvador be heard there. His new law required that any of these refugees have proof of having been refused there, before they would be heard at the border of the U.S. In Guatemala this process takes a year or more, thus most with no resources or help were left to return to danger they fled in their own country.

Yeal Schacher, senior U.S. advocate at Refugees International, recently interviewed some twenty people who had been sent to Guatemala. About half of the people she spoke with had not known they were going to Guatemala when they were put on the plane in the U.S. Some thought they were being transferred to detention centers elsewhere in the U.S. Only one of those she spoke with had decided to seek asylum in Guatemala.

Some of them almost certainly qualified for asylum under U.S. law because they faced clear dangers at home, Schacher contends. One was a former Honduran police officer that said a gang had threatened to kill him because he was a witness in a criminal case. His wife and child were granted asylum in the U.S. on the basis of his case, but he was sent to Guatemala. Schacher said he seemed savvy and could likely advocate for himself.

Another was a 19 year old from Honduras who was panicking because he knew no one in Guatemala, the rest of his family was in the U.S. and he was fleeing a gang that had raped his sister. "This is the kind of kid who in 72 hours (the limit of time Guatemala gives to make the appeal), without any medical counseling, without legal counseling, is not going to know what the hell to do," Schacher said.

So many of the refugees we see are extremely vulnerable. They come with nothing but a backpack, dependent on the charity of people along the way. They thrill to be able to clean up, get a meal, sleep a bit, and grateful to set out again. They are God's anawim of our day, trusting in His Divine Providence.

Note: Peter has spent a life in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation ministries. In his article he shares his experience of years ministering and living at the Southern Border.

