

Erbele Etchings – Spring 2019

April 2019

Dear Friends,

Blessed Holy Week! Hebrews 9 tells us that by Christ’s blood our deliverance is secured for all time, and the blood of Jesus washes our consciences clean from dead works in order to serve the living God. Jesus offered himself to God through the eternal Spirit as a sacrifice without any flaw. We have the promise of the eternal inheritance on the basis of his death.

It is our prayer that, indeed, each person may know, in this life, the joy, hope, courage and peace found only in our risen Christ who reigns forever as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It seems appropriate that we write this missive during Holy Week. **This month we have witnessed and participated in diverse expressions of Christian compassion and unwavering conviction.**

UMCOR Western Jurisdiction Disaster Response Academy and Early Response Training

Over 200 volunteers from across the west came to Scottsdale, AZ to be better equipped for being with those in times of crisis. When disasters happen, it is local churches that provide the first response to their communities. This basic understanding – that disaster response is local – forms the foundation for UMCOR’s U.S. disaster training and response efforts.

Early Response Teams (ERTs) fill a specific need in the early days after a disaster to clean out damaged homes, remove debris, place tarps on roofs and otherwise help to prevent further damage, while providing a caring Christian presence. Under very specific guidelines, ERTs assist survivors without causing further harm or being a burden to the affected community. ERTs are not a first-response group of emergency workers, nor are they recovery, rebuild or repair teams. Find out how you can be in ministry with UMCOR and UMVIM:

<https://www.umcmmission.org/umcor/learn>

<https://www.umcmmission.org/serve-with-us/umvim>



UMCOR SAWYERS are trained to engage fires by clearing tress and removing consumable debris.

Six of us then traveled to Tucson and Nogales, Mexico for what was called Immigration Immersion.



Border Patrol inspecting rail cars.

We began by visiting the huge Border Patrol office campus to learn their perspective on border security and how they

address it. **Very** simply put, their role is much like a local

police force: they use the means necessary to enforce the laws of the US government to ensure the safety and protection of its citizens.

*Here are two common scenarios: A person apprehended crossing the border illegally is interrogated, detained and will most likely be sent back to their country.

A person who presents himself at the border will be interviewed (We couldn’t figure out by who. Nor did the Border Patrol answer the question.). During the interview the person may request asylum. When the interview is complete the person is either approved and sent for further processing or refused and sent to detention for deportation. According to the Border Patrol agent, there often are scenarios and “what ifs” that change the outcome of a person’s status.

In 2016, ICE came to Bishop Hoshibata of the Desert Southwest Conference and asked if UM churches would house migrants that



A Border Patrol agent called this the “**Quitter’s Beacon**”. Beacons are scattered in the desert for migrant use. A person in need of help or one who wants to “quit” can activate the beacon and Border Patrol will come and get them.

have been vetted by INS, help them make contact with their host families and make travel arrangements. The UMC and other churches said yes to ICE. ICE asked for help because they recognized that they were not able to keep up with

the flow of people. **However, all has not gone smoothly.**

For unknown reasons and at random intervals, ICE drops large groups of people off at the bus station (0.5 miles from the church) or areas around the city centers. The INN was given its name by the United Methodists because it opened December 2016 and the very first guest was a man named Jesus. Take a look at The INN PROJECT facebook post for Palm Sunday for a firsthand account of the intentional disruption caused by ICE. 120 people were dropped off in the downtown area of Tucson with no provisions. The INN’s manager, Gretchen, heard about the drop-off because a citizen gave her a call. .When she arrived and asked the agent why, the reply was simply, “Orders.”



Gretchen Lopez is the definition of OPEN HEART OPEN HANDS OPEN DOORS

THE INN PROJECT

The United Methodist INN Project operates in the basement of First United Methodist Church in Tucson. The INN and other churches receive migrants who have been vetted

by ICE. Before 2016, ICE used to

drop off migrants at the bus station with no money, no food, only the clothing they are wearing and little English. ICE now, (unless they decide not to) delivers people in unmarked vans to the care of the church. At the INN they are welcomed by Gretchen and a team of volunteers who give them a warm meal, clothing, and a cot for 3 nights, while helping them contact their sponsors and purchase bus or plane tickets. When the day arrives, travelers are taken to the bus station with enough food and clothing to get to their destination.

Adults are brought to the INN wearing an ankle tracking device.



Our final stop of the day was at the county coroner's office. He explained how they record the geographical coordinates of each body found in the desert, the frustrations of forensics in identifying the victims and the efforts they take to contact relatives if at all possible. He had a gruesome slide show. In 2018 the medical examiner had 178 cases but believes that number to be underreported by up to double.

The following day the group traveled to Nogales, AZ and then walked across the border to Nogales, Mexico. They identify themselves as two cities with one heart. Along with visiting the United Methodist Church and various agencies providing food and shelter for immigrants in Mexico, we had a meeting with the U.S. Consul. We were given pause as we looked at "the wall" from the Mexican side while standing in the spot where a 16-year-old boy shot by a U.S. Border Patrol agent in 2012.



On the Mexican side the wall is tall and flat. While on the US side the wall has 2 rows of razor wire.

Nogales is the sixth largest border crossing into the US. More than 900 semi-trucks with fresh perishables for the US market cross the border each day. The Mexican driver drives to a cold storage transfer station 5 miles into the US where then a licensed American driver takes the truck to its destination. Approximately 50,000 train cars of goods cross at Nogales each year. A common question in Nogales, USA is: "What happens to the economy if the border is closed?"

WATER IN THE DESERT

On the third day we joined a volunteer named Joel from Humane Borders as he delivered water to stations in the desert. He drove a truck with a large tank of water and then refilled barrels along well-known migrant trails. He notes the amount of water used since the last refill. At each of the



50 water stations there is a blue flag on a thirty-foot pole to alert the traveler of a place of rest. Each barrel has a sticker of The Virgin of Guadalupe. Most immigrants don't speak English and don't know if they can trust the water to be safe. Joel said, "Everybody knows the Virgin. She is the protector of travelers. She speaks for us when we are not here to help."

Jerry, a snowbird from Seattle, volunteers with a group called Samaritans. We loaded a beat-up 4-wheel drive with gallon jugs of water, zip lock bags containing granola bars, socks and Band-Aids. We came to a trail head and then walked into the desert to deposit the supplies. A record is kept of how much was left so that the next Samaritan can know how much was used. The particular trail we walked followed a barbed wire border that led into the high mountains. The trail veered toward a cleft in a group of boulders that offered a cool shaded spot. For the Erbeles, the gallons were heavy, it was hot, the thistles ouch and we only walked a mile. **One thought kept running through my mind, "How desperate must these men, women and children be that they leave all they know? Who is their Pharaoh driving them into the desert?"**



A Samaritan volunteer makes crosses which serve as grave markers. These markers are placed where human



remains were found. We stopped at several. The last one was 25 miles into Arizona. We were brought to tears as we contemplated the plight of the mother and what she must have gone through to get to this point only to give birth to a child who died.

We had innocuous visits with authorities who are doing their job and enforcing the law. At one checkpoint the Border Agent wanted to talk about pick-ups because he had one like ours. At another checkpoint the officer talked ad infinitum about his life story (this happens every time they find out we are clergy). He even planned to retire in Mexico. On the other hand, there are people like the INN Project and other faith based groups, Humane Borders and Samaritans that believe everyone has the right to live in safety and be treated with dignity. Tension is inevitable but the people we met are seeking ways to cooperate.

We thank you for your prayers and support.

Teri and Evelyn Erbele

Teri: erbele@gmail.com
907-220-1953

Evelyn:
eerbele@umcmmission.org
907-220-1951



Teri is helping to compile travel packets of snack foods and hygiene items for the bus ride.

**DISCLAIMER: A 96 hour visit to the border does not an expert make. We do not have a full understanding of the workings of the US Border Patrol, Immigration & Naturalization Services (INS) or Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the process used to determine who is illegal or how or why those who present themselves at the border requesting asylum are granted or denied entry. Even those directly involved tell us there are more questions than answers.*