

Personal Stories

From our own UCC family, TOX ministries in Phoenix

Mother of three: I am a citizen. My husband is not. Our three children ask "Are we going to lose our Dad?" I try to explain what might or might not happen, but children don't understand law.

Fr: I am a citizen, but my brother is not. If he calls for a ride to work or to church, I will not tell him no. What happens to me if I am pulled over? I am stopped, and now I am a criminal. Friends will ask for a ride to church or to work, and I do not ask a friend who needs a ride: "Do you have papers."

Ca: I have been in America for 24 years, my family moved here when I was 5. I have tried for years to follow legal procedures for citizenship. I spent over \$30,000 before a judge ruled that because I was young, I could adapt and deported me. I have two children here, 11 and 13. I walked back through the desert to risk being with them again, and almost died. I can't look for a job. What if I get pulled over? I have no family in Mexico and would not know where to go for housing, for a job, for a community.

When the members of TOX were asked if, even though the new law is not in effect, "Are things worse?" There was an immediate and visceral response, "Yes!"

The story was told of a girl that was robbed. She was Hispanic and a US citizen but had no ID (it was taken in the robbery). She speaks no Spanish. The policeman who took her complaint of robbery told her to wait while he called for help. He called the Sheriff's department, who came and detained her on suspicion of being here without documentation. They would eventually release her when her family came with identification. *(We were told this was an illegal action taken by law enforcement officials. If you say you are a citizen, they cannot ask you for documentation. If you are driving, they can ask for a license, but they cannot search or detain you or ask you to produce papers.)*

A Politician's Perspective

Senator Guitierrez (16 years in the Arizona Senate, 14 as Senate majority leader) was present and spoke about this new law. He spoke of a granddaughter who came here at the age of 3, graduated with honors from a nearby college - but who is not documented.

He addressed the impact of the law in human terms.

Being undocumented, according to this new law, is a crime. No bail is established, so once detained and put in jail there is no way out. The detainee will be brought to the custody of ICE officials (this is part of the 287G agreement) to be processed and declared illegal. A second mechanism that is used is the "Secure Community" Act or Agreement which gives local law enforcement officials access to federal databases used to determine whether the person now captured is a legal or illegal immigrant.

The processing can take up to a week, during which time every day great pressure is being put upon the detainee to sign a voluntary departure statement saying they are not legal and will be deported. Once that is signed, or their research proves that one is here without documentation, they are transported to the border and simply released on the other side. No consideration is given to where family is or may be. They are given no resources. This happens whether one is a child, a mother, a father.

Somos America has a number that people can call to refer abuses. 1,000 deportations a day are carried out in the state of Arizona - more than 50% of all deportations originate in Arizona - more than all the other 49 states and territories combined. And this is true even though Texas and California have more undocumented immigrants.

One woman, while in detainment, was brought in daily and pressured to sign her voluntary departure form. They finally obtained her signature, but when released to ICE she was taken not to the border but to the hospital to treat the arm that was broken as a result of actions taken to compel her signature.

The law mentions "reasonable suspicion." You can't be stopped just for being brown - there has to be a crime committed to be stopped. Most frequently, that crime is a broken taillight on the car. This new law permits local police enforcement officials to stop a car for a violation, ask the driver for his license and all other occupants for their papers.

Rhode Island UMC Clergy

Last week, five pastors took a leap of faith and traveled to the Arizona borderlands to understand more about what is arising in the country). Great issues are at stake with respect to the demonization of immigrants. The emergency trip resulted in life-changing emotions and realizations.

Constitutional rights have been suspended within 20 miles of the US border. I was warned for example, by a friendly priest that photographs like that above were restricted by Border Patrol, and that there was actually no right to drive on public roads by US citizens in their zone.

There is so much to say - and do - and so many people of humanity and courage - from friendly sheriffs, to ranchers, to workers, to migrants risking their lives for food, to suburban retirees struggling to extend mercy, to church members doing a thousand things to create humane borders. And of course there is the other side, the guns pulled on people with brown skin, the drug mafia along the border taking its revenge on anyone - ranchers or migrants - who stands in their way, the new corporate economic plans that will work to further destroy environment and living standards on both sides of the border.

Most importantly, we need to send some delegations of folks, church members, other justice people, from all strata of society, down to see and hear and experience. We will also need to raise money to pay for the trip we just took and for others to go too and to provide material support to those who serve along the border and here.

We took hundreds of photos and brought back about 8 hours of video interviews. We hope to soon set up a web site where information can be networked.

Here is a draft of six core understandings that the Pastor's Delegation have felt in the experience. (We'll be refining this as we go).

Six Initial Conclusions & Observations from the Emergency Pastor's Trip to Arizona

1. People who are crossing the desert to get into the US are desperate, with many facing hunger, hopelessness and death at home, or death in the desert. Thousands of men, women, and children have already died.
2. This northward migration is significantly caused by US corporate interests and other policies which are crushing people's opportunity to make a living in their home countries.
3. The militarization of the US border and fear-based new anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona and Rhode Island and other places is threatening and undermining the democratic and civil rights of all US citizens, as well as the human rights of others.
4. Children are being forcibly separated from parents, people who are just trying to survive are being held in mass detention centers and are often chained foot, waist and wrists.

5. This oppressive conditions, denial of rights, and human suffering being forced on migrants will, at their end, strip citizens from their rights as well.
6. Freedom requires humane borders and fair and decent policies of immigration. Justice and love demands a response from all people of faith and good will.

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