

SPR 2018 MISSION TRIP JOURNAL

In August 2018, the St. Paul & the Redeemer youth group traveled to Tucson, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico to learn from local immigration justice advocates about U.S./Mexico border policy. Each night, the youth took turns writing reflections on the day's events.

Day 1: The Migrant's Prayer

Sunday, August 19, 2018

Liam de Jong

Today was hard and fun at the same time. To start the day, we had to wake up at 4:00 AM to go to Midway Airport. It was hard, but everyone seemed somewhat awake and ready for an awesome trip. We arrived in Phoenix, Arizona at about 9:00 AM (PST). Then we drove for an hour and a half to Tucson, driven by a great man named Allen. We're staying at a place called BorderLinks, which helps educate communities like us about undocumented immigrants coming to the U.S. After we got there, we got settled in and had an orientation of the place as well as a large Q&A with our lovely delegation leader, Xavi.

With Xavi, we did a popular education workshop dealing with race, immigrants, and migration through time, starting from before the year 1420. I learned about the laws that had prohibited people from full inclusion in the U.S. It was a great conversation.

Then we had dinner, made by a community group named Mariposas sin Fronteras, which was superb. To end the day, we had devotions, talking about the Good Samaritan and Childish Gambino's song "This is America," and a final prayer called the Migrant's Prayer. Overall, it was a great day, and we're all

excited for tomorrow. We're even going to bed early!

Here's the Migrant's Prayer, if you want to read it like we did. We started in Spanish, and then read it in English:

*Viajar hacia Ti Señor, eso es vivir.
Partir es un poco morir.
Llegar nunca es llegar definitivo
hasta descansar en Ti.
Tú, Señor, conociste la migrancia,
y la hiciste presente
a todo hombre que comprende qué es vivir,
y quiere llegar seguro al puerto de la vida.
Tú sacaste de su tierra a Abraham,
padre de todos los creyentes.
Tú recordaste cuáles eran los caminos
para llegar a Ti, por los profetas y los apóstoles.
Tú mismo te hiciste Migrante del cielo a la tierra.
Amén.*

*The journey toward you, Lord, is life.
To set off is to die a little.
To arrive is never to arrive
until one is at rest with you.
You, Lord, experienced migration.
You brought it upon all men
who know what it is to live,
who seek safe passage to the gates of heaven.
You drove Abraham from his land,*

*father of all believers.
You shall remember the paths leading to you,
the prophets and the apostles.
You yourself became a migrant
from heaven to earth.
Amen.*

Day 2: Decriminalizing Migration
Monday, August 20, 2018
Julia Rademacher-Wedd

Today we confronted the way that im/migrants who cross the border from Mexico are treated by the US justice system. We began the day with pancakes and eggs provided by Chef Daniel Giles, then piled in to minivans to travel to Southside Presbyterian Church. There, AmyBeth Willis taught us about the history of Southside Presbyterian. It started as a segregated church for Native Americans, then became a worship space for other minorities, eventually becoming a mostly white church that had a high profile in the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s. Since that time, 14,000 people have slept on the floors of Southside Presbyterian as a tool in fighting deportation proceedings.

We returned to the BorderLinks dorms to learn about Operation Streamline. Operation Streamline speeds up the judicial process that criminalizes those who cross the border without papers, prosecuting 75-85 people per day. Tucson is one of several border cities that has this court proceeding, and after lunch we went to witness it in person. Lois from the End Streamline Coalition, a group that wants to stop the criminalization of migration, including Operation Streamline, accompanied us to the Arizona District Court to bear witness and take notes on the details of the proceedings.

For about an hour and a half, we witnessed almost 75 people receive deportation orders, criminal records, and in many cases, several months in prison. The court was not interested in the stories of these im/migrants, only whether they had permission from the US government to be in the country. Their lawyers, most of whom were being contracted by the government, had up to 5 cases each. All proceedings were conducted through a Spanish interpreter. The dehumanization of the process is hard to describe, but a way that a member of our group, Ari, countered the reduction of people to a name and action, was to draw the people themselves in his notebook.

After leaving the court, we walked to a shrine called El Tiradito for im/migrants who are missing or have died in the desert. The shrine was built while this area was part of Mexico for people without graves. Notes and candles are lefts for loved ones lost in the desert, and it is the place that we reflected on our experience of observing Operation Streamline.

Back at the dorms, we had a wonderful dinner and sat down to watch *13th*, a documentary about the loophole written into the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution that guarantees freedom to all American citizens—except for those who are convicted of a crime. This loophole has led black and brown Americans to be disproportionately incarcerated and essentially enslaved. One way that this has been done has been criminalizing black men, similar to the way that migration is now criminalized, which we witnessed in the morning at the courthouse. We reflected on questions such about why and how people of color have been criminalized and whom this process serves.

At devotions, we reflected on our day, closing with a reading of the Migrant's Prayer again, in both Spanish and English.

On a lighter note, it seems the stereotypes about the Southwest and cacti are grounded in reality. There are cacti everywhere.

Day 3: Purposeful Action
Tuesday, August 21, 2018
Ari Karafiol

Today's mission focused on the subject of purpose and purposeful action. We drove early in the morning out to the desert with a member of No Más Muertes (No More Deaths) to replenish water drops, which are sites on the desert trails near the US-Mexico border which provide jugs of water and buckets of food to migrants. On this venture, we discussed how although the opposite of fear is defined as hope, we should think as the opposite of fear as being love. The border patrol embodies fear on the US-Mexico border by slashing water jugs and leading migrant groups to believe that the water drops are traps so that they avoid the drops altogether. The love we weaponized to combat this fear came in the form of food and water, but it also came in writing messages of love and support, particularly using religious symbols, on the water jugs so that the migrants would trust them to be tokens of love and not of fear.

On the trail, we also saw a shrine built by migrant groups. Although the migrant groups have a strict implicit rule of leaving no trace of their existence in order to avoid discovery by border patrol, these migrant groups also choose to leave rosaries, photographs, and other tokens in these shrines as beacons of love, even with the risks that these actions carry. These shrines disarm fear of capture,

fear of detainment, fear of death in the desert. They serve as symbols of the fundamental humanity of each migrant, and the power of hope and of love to move people forward.

After we returned from the water drops, we listened to a leader of People Helping People discuss the necessity of tracking deaths of migrants facing the United States' deterrence policy and the racism of this policy in dehumanizing brown bodies. Purposeful action in this case takes its form in a volunteer like Lisa, who moved to the border town of Arivacas in order to better serve the migrant community. It is one thing to donate a few hours of one's time or a percentage of one's money to help a cause. It is a sacrifice and a purpose to dedicate one's entire life for the sake of an oppressed group.

The group spent the afternoon listening to the story of "D," an immigrant in the Tucson community who faced both dehumanization as an undocumented immigrant but also as an Afro-Latino man. "D" was able to make his way to the U.S. despite being kidnapped by drug traffickers and pursued by border patrol. Purposeful action for "D" came in the form of a woman opening her home to him and offering him food and rest, saving his life.

Like the water drops, the donations of food, water, and time made more of a net positive in the lives of the people to whom they were donated than to the people privileged enough to have access to these assets. Purposeful action means recognizing your privilege and using it as a tool to help people with less. It means taking sides even at the risk of your social capital, and siding with the people not in power. It means understanding that you will never understand the experience of an oppressed group you are not a part of. It means being willing to

listen, not for the sake of enlightenment, but for the sake of being a better ally to the community by being able to recognize your ignorance.

Day 4: God's Presence in the Darkness
Wednesday, August 22, 2018
James Pruitt & Anaise Serice

[Today on the agenda: We crossed the border into Nogales, Mexico and heard from community members there. We did an economic exercise where we went into a Mexican grocery store and compared the disparity between wages and prices in Mexico to that between wages and prices in the United States. We also visited the shrine of José Antonio Elena Rodríguez, a sixteen-year-old boy on the Mexico side of the border who was shot and killed by border police from the U.S. side of the border.)

Today is our fourth day in Arizona, and although it may seem that the world is becoming overrun with the darkness of the night, our trip to Nogales reminded us that on the fourth day God created the stars and the moon to illuminate the trail of hope for a future with daylight for all. Whenever we saw the despair that darkness may bring today, be it the story of Jose Antonio's murder by border patrol or the expensive poverty that is so pervasive in Nogales's sweatshop-dependent economy, there are always little bits of colorful starlight that, although sometimes small, add up to the constellation of God.

We had an emotional time going to the border, but we all felt we had to be there. Listening to the stories of the people showed us that we are not alone, and everyone we met welcomed into their homes and treated us like family. We saw God with

us many times today, and no matter how good or bad the system was, God was there!

Day 5: Standing on Native Land
Thursday, August 23, 2018
Teagan Bigger

Today was great. We learned a lot of important things from all the people we met. First, this morning, we drove down to the Tohono O'odham Nation Cultural Center and learned about the people whose native land we are on. We got an oral history of the nation and learned many interesting things including the fact that the Tohono O'odham people had no system of writing until 1986! Then we went and met with April from Indivisible Tohono and learned that there are 33,000 Tohono O'odham people with tribal status and that the U.S./Mexico border cuts through 72 miles of their reservation land.

After some lunch and mission trip-themed D&D playing, we came back to Tucson to meet with Summer, a local activist who works with Chukson Water Protectors and Free the Children, as well as many other organizations. Chukson Water Protectors is an organization led by indigenous people, but open to all, that was started in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's work on protecting the water threatened by the Dakota Access Pipeline. Free the Children raises money to bail people out and keep families together in an effort to end family separation and child detention.

After our very moving discussion with Summer, we got to make pupusas, which are essentially corn tortillas stuffed with something like beans and cheese. After we ate dinner, we got to meet with Carolina, who works with an organization called Mariposas Sin Fronteras, and she told us her story.

Mariposas Sin Fronteras, which means Butterflies Without Borders, works primarily with immigrants in detention centers who are from the LGBTQ+ community. Mariposas Sin Fronteras (in addition to being our cooks for the week!) pays people's bonds, writes letters of support and recommendation for asylum, and visits people in detention centers.

All of the stories we learned today and everyday have been meaningful beyond belief, and we look forward to sharing more about what we learned at our Youth Sunday on September 16, 2018!

**Day 6: Equal Rights for Undocumented People
Friday, August 24, 2018
Matthew Erlec & Ben Pruitt**

Today was our last program day with BorderLinks. Here's what we did!

A group we met with today called Scholarships A-Z is helping to provide resources for undocumented immigrants to gain scholarships. The members who came to speak with us were undocumented, so they shared what their experience with the education system is like, as well as general differences between their experience and a documented student's experience. They told us how their siblings were fortunately able to gain some status through DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), giving them a work permit, Social Security number, and un-prioritizing them from being deported from the U.S. Though the whole family applied, only some of the siblings qualified, which showed us the unevenness of how DACA is awarded between applicants. Since the two people we met with were undocumented, they did not have work permits, so they are unable to legally work in the U.S., even though they have gone

through high school and one of them was able to begin college.

They told us how they were given a goal, like many young people, from a young age: "Once you get to this point, you can get a job." But they were never eligible for employment because of their undocumented status, so, unlike us, they were unable to reach this thing they were building to for their whole lives. They told us about how they cannot legally apply for driver's licenses and how they couldn't go on school trips to other states, countries, and even some nearby in-state places, since they would not be able to prove their citizenship or get passports. They were also not able to access in-state tuition for state colleges.

Scholarships A-Z wants to try to give opportunities to undocumented people, and they have definitely done that. Their organization provides these opportunities to undocumented people all across the country. We were thankful to hear about their experiences, especially because we are also students.

After lunch, Monica, a representative of Paisanos Unidos de Tucson, an undocumented-led organization that teaches undocumented people how to interact with Border Patrol and other law enforcement to decrease their chances to be detained/deported. Monica was nice to us, and asked each of us 1) our name, 2) where we were from, and 3) something someone had told us that made us feel better when we were going through a tough time. We liked her a lot.

Later, we did a simulation called It's Raining Rocks in Chicago, where looked at the interests of different people in the story (a group of aid

workers, a rich businessperson, politicians, and a group of villagers).

After that, we drove to a mountain pass to reflect. Unfortunately, it rained hard while we were there so we didn't stay long, but we did see a rainbow!

Thank you to our mission partners in Tucson and Nogales!

- BorderLinks
- Mariposas Sin Fronteras
- Southside Presbyterian Church
- End Streamline Coalition
- No Más Muertes/No More Deaths
- People Helping People
- Chukson Water Protectors
- Free the Children
- Tohono O'odham Nation Cultural Center
- Indivisible Tohono
- Scholarships A-Z
- Paisanos Unidos de Tucson