

On the border

By Sister Linda Stilling, S.S.N.D.

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In the summer of 2013, I crossed the border between Douglas, Ariz., where some of our School Sisters of Notre Dame live, to Agua Prieta, Mexico. Here they minister with migrants, especially those who have just been deported back to Mexico from the U.S.

Every day, I thought about Jesus spending so much of his life with people on the border, on the margins. I found Jesus there, saw him there and touched him there every day. Those May days were a Holy Week, because I touched the suffering Christ in a place where the passion of Christ continues tangibly, daily.

I saw Jesus in sad eyes, muddied clothes, calloused feet, broken hearts and dashed dreams. I saw him in smiling thanks for a cup of water, for a burrito, or for just listening. I heard him in words of encouragement given one to the other or in the phrase “Gracias, gracias.”

The Migrant Resource Center is next to the border crossing where the deportees arrive in Mexico. They are welcomed, fed and given a safe place to consider their options and receive some guidance for their next step.

I met Alvaro, who had huge blisters on his feet from three days walking in the desert. He had just been deported to Mexico when a woman who was jogging saw his feet and told him to wait right there. She went home, got him a pair of sandals and powdered medicine for his blisters. Then she disappeared. Alvaro said he would never forget his “angel.”

Isabel, a young single mom, was agonizing over how to be reunited with her 6- and 8-year-old girls who were U.S. citizens living in Phoenix. She has not been able to hold back her tears since being forcibly deported and separated from her little girls.

Abraham, a blind man, was brought to us by other deportees. They were so worried he was going to try to cross the border because a “coyote” had told him he could get medical help in the U.S. I fear Abraham will be among those “dying to live,” risking his life walking in the desert, just to have a chance at the kind of life many of us take for granted.

While the Coalition of Human Rights of Tucson accounts for 2,595 bodies recovered in the Arizona desert since 2000, it is estimated that more than 6,000 have probably lost their lives along the U.S.-Mexico border since 2000.

All whom I met are crossing the border to find work to help their children and families living in dire poverty. The suffering, hardships and dangers in the desert seemed their only way out. For them, it is the price of love.

We truly need just laws that allow people to enter legally and prevent this unnecessary suffering and death. When policies are just, humane and compassionate, an immigration system will flourish.

Jesus stood on the borders. It is where Christ stands throughout history. When we stand there, we are in good company.

School Sister of Notre Dame Linda Stilling is Spanish Language and Culture Program Coordinator at Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore.

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