

WOMEN'S

PERSPECTIVES

Uprooted People—Migration

Editorial

By Colleen McCue, Guest Editor

Death and Life on the Border: The Perils of the Migrant Journey

I had an opportunity to witness the perils of the migrant journey when I visited Arizona and Mexico as part of a Borderlinks exposure trip. Borderlinks is an organization which helps North Americans understand issues of trade and globalization and the concerns of migrants on the border.

We spent some time in the square in the small town of Altar, Mexico. At first glance it was just as you would imagine any town square in Mexico with a cathedral on one side surrounded by little stalls and restaurants. However a second look revealed some strange things. All of the stalls were selling balaclavas, large water bottles, backpacks, gloves that could withstand barbed wire, baseball caps and fingernail clippers that could be used to open canned food. The square was lined with vans that were being loaded with people heading to the border.

Up to 1500 people arrive in Altar on a daily basis as a starting place on their migrant journey north. There is a community centre there run by the Catholic Church that cares for migrants by offering hot meals, shelter, a medical clinic and a human rights office where people can file complaints if they have been abused along the way.

The square itself was filled with young men waiting. Amongst the crowds of young men there was a family, a mother and a father and a young child. We learned that they were going to begin their desert crossing that night. I looked down at their feet, the feet that would carry them across the harsh desert terrain, and saw that the woman was only wearing a pair of flimsy flip-flops. We were herded back on to the bus but before we left, one among our group who could speak Spanish told the woman that she could get a pair of sturdy shoes at the migrant centre run by the Catholic Church just around the corner.

My mind was full of questions. Why were so many people risking their lives on a potentially deadly desert crossing only to get to the US and be forced to take what are known in America as “3-D jobs” (dirty, dull and dangerous)? How

bad was it at home if somehow a deadly desert crossing and a life of hard work under cover seemed like the only alternative?

Migration is a survival mechanism. Those who are migrating have been uprooted by forces beyond their control—it could be because of free trade policies which have destroyed the livelihoods of small farmers and entrepreneurs, or because of a dam which has forced them from their land.

Migrants who cross the border like this end up working in garment factories, in agriculture, in construction, in service industries. They are willing to take jobs that Canadians/Americans will not do, at wages that Canadians/Americans will not accept and are highly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and danger. Despite the myths and misconceptions about migrants that are perpetuated—that they are

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“queue-jumpers” out to steal our jobs and take advantage of our welfare system—in truth, the migrant is the embodiment of the treasured ideal of “family values” and a noble work ethic, for migrants represent life-support systems to family members left back home.

As our journey that day wrapped up and we headed back to the highway under the canopy of a million stars I was left struggling with what boiled down to one question: is it appropriate for me to receive all of the benefits of the global economy without any of the responsibility for it?

I have thought of that family from the town square in Altar many times in the months since my visit. What happened to them on their desert journey? Did they have enough water to drink along the way? Was the child okay? Did they make it? Are they living underground in America?

This issue of *Women’s Perspectives* highlights actions in support of migrants’ struggles to rebuild their lives and communities across borders. Tanya Chute Molina reflects on the many boundaries that separate us from our neighbours and the consequences of globalization and the new age of

security for migrants and uprooted people. In an article by Katharine Masterton we learn about how the International Affairs Committee of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is examining the migrant reality. Jean Lashley takes us into the heart of the Holland Marsh, a fertile agricultural region north of Toronto, and exposes us to the often harsh realities of Seasonal Agricultural Workers. In his article, Rick Ufford Chase puts a human face on the complexities of globalization and migration. Jean Morris shares a reflection on her experience meeting migrants on the US/Mexican border and the opportunity that the Church has to give a voice to the voiceless. Derek Macleod reviews the provocative novel *The Tortilla Curtain* by T. C. Boyle, which explores the pursuit of the North American dream and its dark underside.

Colleen McCue is the Program Coordinator for Finance & Administration and Refugees for Presbyterian World Service & Development. In April 2005 she participated in a Borderlinks exposure tour to Arizona and Northern Mexico to learn about migration issues.

Congratulations to Colleen and Thang on the birth of their daughter Helen on August 29.

Boundaries of Belonging

By Tanya Chute Molina

The irony of globalization is that goods and capital are free to move, while people—especially poor people—are not. Tellingly, the history of increasing migration controls closely parallels the evolution of globalization

We live in an age of walls. Walls of greed. Walls of fear. Walls of exclusion. Inside the walls are the privileged and the powerful. Outside are the poor and the persecuted. Increasingly, vulnerable migrants and refugees knock on closed doors.

The irony of globalization is that goods and capital are free to move, while people—especially poor people—are not. Tellingly, the history of increasing migration controls closely parallels the evolution of globalization. Canada began its strategy of interdiction in 1989, the same year in which it signed a free trade agreement with the US. Under this strategy, “migration integrity officers” intercept those without proper travel documents at airports abroad—long before they have the chance to reach Canadian soil.

The US, for its part, introduced a series of militarized operations by the US Border Patrol in 1994, the same year that it signed NAFTA. The goal of these “operations” was to seal the US/Mexico border to increasing numbers of migrants

searching for relief from the economic insecurity brought on by free trade. In order to seal the border even more effectively, work has begun on a physical border wall.

Coincidence? Or a deliberate strategy of exclusion? One migration scholar writes: “The new walls are designed...to deter a perceived invasion of ‘undesirables’—with unwanted immigrants leading the list of state concerns. Nowhere is this more evident than along the geographic fault lines dividing rich and poor regions.”

Policy walls are reinforced and justified by psychological walls. In the wake of 9-11, media and government discourse fed suspicion of outsiders—particularly refugees and other unsolicited migrants. In 2002, Canada and the US signed the Safe Third Country Agreement, which effectively closed the Canadian border to refugee claimants traveling through the United States. Too often, refugees and migrants are feared and excluded.

The human face of migration

All of these walls hide the human face of migration—parents seeking safety for their families, youth seeking a brighter future. More often than not, the face of migration is a face of vulnerability and hope. The encounter with this human face transforms our understanding - of migrants and of ourselves.

I think of Silvio, a young Salvadoran who dreamed of trying his luck in the US. Named after a famous Cuban musician, the Salvadoran Silvio Rodriguez, Silvio is also a talented guitarist. At 19, he is a respected lay leader in the parish of Ojos de Agua. All of this, of course, represents Silvio's extracurricular activities. Silvio's primary occupation, like that of most men in rural El Salvador, is farming. The main crops are corn and beans, the staples of the local diet. The steep hillsides where most of the planting and harvesting take place make for hard physical labour, without the benefits of mechanical aids. The reward for one's toil is mere survival. With prices for seed and fertilizer on the rise, and prices for basic grains falling due to competition from agri-business imports, it's hard to get ahead as a small farmer in El Salvador.

When I first arrived as a community worker in El Salvador, Silvio would come to visit regularly, asking me to teach him English. Always his argument was the same: "Teach me English. There's no future for me here. I'm going north." Yet the walls to the north loomed large. Silvio had so much to offer—but where was his chance to live out his potential?

A vision of a transformed world

As people of faith, we are called to move beyond walls to solidarity. Solidarity begins by entering into the reality of the 'Silvios' in our communities, caring what happens to them, and working with them to develop a new reality.

Much faith-based reflection on the theme of migration focuses on the biblical call to "welcome the stranger." This spirituality of hospitality has strengths and limitations. Its strength is that it calls us to reach beyond ourselves in a spirit of generosity and compassion. Its limitation is that it can reinforce the boundaries between "us" and "them," "stranger" and "host", rather than helping us to see each other as equals, as neighbours, with equal claims to just treatment, not simply to hospitality.

In a world of walls, we are called to open wide the doors of our hearts, to invite newcomers to make themselves truly at home. God's hospitality is about welcoming all of us in as full members of the divine household. As Paul writes to the Galatians, "So God came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near...So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Gal 2: 17,19).

In order to truly welcome the stranger, we must recognize the stranger as one of us. The walls, borders and barriers between "us" and "them" are only human constructions. The truth is that we are all sisters and brothers, one people under God.

Tanya Chute Molina is the Executive Director of the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto, a place of welcome and assistance for refugees and other newcomers to Canada. Previous experiences include public education and advocacy work on migration issues with KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, and a four year community development assignment with the Mennonite Central Committee in El Salvador. Tanya's passion for migrant justice is rooted in her work and relationships with people on the move. She lives with her husband Esteban in North York.



photo: Borderlinks

Living without Status

Growing global inequality is forcing more and more people to migrate for survival. At the same time, the immigration policies of many industrialized countries are becoming increasingly restrictive. Many of those forced to move have no legal options. The result is a growing number of clandestine migrants—estimated at 30 to 40 million worldwide. Though precise numbers are difficult to determine, researchers estimate that there are anywhere between 20,000 to 200,000 people living without full legal status in Canada.

Source: God's People: A People on the Move, A resource for churches in solidarity with uprooted people, Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

By Katherine Masterton

In September 2005 I left Canada to spend a year teaching English to high school students in France. After graduating university, I had spent a few years working and realized I wanted a change. My realization took me to Metz, a small city in the northeastern province of Lorraine, about 50 kilometers west of the German border and south of Luxembourg. My proximity to so many national borders was exhilarating. I was amazed at the ease with which I could take a train into Germany to shop on a Saturday afternoon. I spent a weekend in Brussels, and was back to work on Monday. I was wholly submerged in a different culture.

As much as I relished my experience, I soon realized how challenging such a dramatic change can be—and how isolating. Listening to the radio was a language lesson requiring a dictionary and patience. In depth conversation was exhausting. Grocery shopping was a walk on the wild side. Gestures and slang phrases required an interpreter. I understood with greater clarity the words *foreigner* and *stranger*. Despite my initial desire to try something new, my heart soon longed for some sense of the familiar, for a sense of home.

I traveled for pleasure. I sought adventure. In thinking back on my experience in France, I can only wonder at the courage, strength and determination of a migrant who travels out of necessity seeking not adventure, but hope, security and a chance to earn a living.

The International Affairs Committee examines the migrant reality

The 2007 report of the International Affairs Committee to General Assembly highlights the challenges and vulnerabilities of migrants. It reflects on the ordinariness of migration in the bible and the concept of neighbour.

The question “Who is my neighbour?” is answered in Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25–37) in a way that breaks through the normal cozy definitions of neighbour. The neighbour—represented in the story by both the man beaten by robbers and the Samaritan who comes to his assistance—is the one in need, the victim, the stranger, the outsider. How we treat our neighbour, and how we are the neighbour, are near to God’s heart. As we show hospitality to strangers, we allow our own vulnerability and open ourselves to transformation from fear and suspicion to hope and solidarity and new life for all. (Heb. 13:1–3)

(IAC Report, A&P 2007)

Shared vulnerability, shared strength

I am empowered by this definition. Neighbours are equally one in need, and one serving a need. If we serve a neighbour, and are equally the neighbour being served, we find shared strength. If our neighbours are equally friends and strangers, our potential to serve and know love is multiplied. Can you imagine the power of our combined strength and love? The lives of all neighbours are then equally important and cherished. As we strive to become Christ-like, we acknowledge with equal gratitude our own lives and the lives of others, strangers and friends alike.

There are more than 175 million migrants in the world. In 2005, 100,000 migrant workers entered Canada. While 27% of these people were engaged in managerial, professional and skilled-labour work, 67% of workers entered as low-skilled labour. Low-skilled and domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and unsafe or substandard working conditions.

In the 1970s The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations expressed alarm at human trafficking practices and the exploitation of migrant workers and hosted a seminar on the human rights of migrant workers. The seminar emphasized the need to accord migrant workers equality before the law with regard to human rights and labour legislation; to treat humanely aliens who remain in a State illegally; and to avoid situations in which migrant workers are kept in illegal status for long periods. A UN working group was established to develop a Convention to address the vulnerability of migrant workers. The Migrant Workers’ Convention was the fruit of this labour. The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1990. December 18th has since been named as International Migrants’ Day. The Moderator of the 133rd General Assembly wrote to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration urging Canada to sign the Convention.

Acknowledging vulnerability and serving our neighbours underscores not only the dignity and value of a human life, but empowers one to believe that fellowship and support can be found wherever it is needed. We know support and strength from God in the gift of our neighbours, friends and strangers alike.

Katharine Masterton is a program coordinator with Justice Ministries at national office of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Justice Ministries is the secretariat to the International Affairs Committee. As the program coordinator, she was involved in the research and preparation of the IAC report on migration. She lives in Toronto and is a member of Unionville Presbyterian Church.

Sowing Seeds of Community in the Heart of the Holland Marsh

by Jean Lashley

Farming is hard work, work that few Canadians are willing to do. Our local produce is most likely picked by people from other countries. While we rely on the workers to keep our agricultural production healthy, we do not always treat them well.

As you pass through the town of Bradford in the heart of the Holland Marsh, a fertile agricultural region north of Toronto, a large mural on the wall of a building depicts fair skinned, blue eyed men working the furrows. This perhaps reminds us of the first growers from Holland and Europe, who drained and cultivated the rich muck of the marsh, but it does not reflect today's reality. Every summer for the past thirty years, the farms of the Holland Marsh have been home to hundreds of foreign workers, mostly from Mexico and some from the Caribbean, who work along side the small family farmers, or increasingly under foremen in larger farming operations. They arrive as early as February to work in packing plants or greenhouse operations, and stay as late as early December to finish the harvest, and prepare ground and equipment for the following year's operation.

These migrant workers are largely invisible to the surrounding communities, except for Friday evenings or Saturdays when they enter town to go to the bank or buy groceries. They are seen riding bicycles on the side of the road perhaps, or noticed working out in the fields by the rare driver on the rural roads of the marsh.

The birth of a migrant ministry

For over twenty years, the Christian Reformed Churches on the Holland Marsh have collaborated to provide a weekly

Spanish language service from June to October, followed by a meal, and sometimes English classes or soccer games. Since 1999, the Catholic churches of Newmarket and Bradford, supported by Catholic Community Services of York Region, have also reached out to migrant workers through *El Sembrador*, a ministry with Mexican workers. "El Sembrador" is the Spanish word for "sower", a word which carries agricultural and Biblical meanings, conveying the desire to plant seeds of connection and community and shared faith.

From a humble beginning in 1999, starting with informal farm visits and the provision of transportation to a monthly mass in Newmarket, *El Sembrador* has grown into a weekly mass in Bradford, organized farm visits, the organization of social events, translation services, visiting sick workers, providing prayer books or Bibles, and helping people access community services.

On Father's Day, 2007, over 100 Mexican fathers, separated from their wives and children, gather in Holy Martyrs of Japan church hall in Bradford to enjoy a BBQ organized by *El Sembrador*. Doug White, the mayor of the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, welcomes the migrant workers and acknowledges that the local economy is based on agriculture and dependent on their contribution. "As long as you are in Bradford, you are citizens of Bradford," he assures



them. Two elected federal deputies from Mexico, the equivalent of our Canadian members of Parliament, are also present in the crowd as part of a fact finding tour to talk to the workers and find out about their lives in Canada. They bring greetings but spend most of their time listening to the workers' concerns and stories.

From numbers to neighbours

The Father's Day BBQ is but one example of the social and spiritual support provided by *El Sembrador*. Underlying this migrant ministry is the realization of the importance of placing a face and a name to the migrant story as a way to make the hardship and the injustice real. When we talk to Gregorio who is working in Canada to pay for his gravely ill teenage daughter's cancer treatment in Mexico, and realize that he may be sacrificing his chance to be with her in her last months of life in order to give her some chance for survival, it is different than hearing about statistics. When we share the joy of the news of Roberto's first grandchild, we start to become community.

Farming is hard work, work that few Canadians are willing to do. Our local produce is most likely picked by people from other countries. While we rely on the workers to keep our agricultural production healthy, we do not always treat them well. The contracts under which they come to Canada

offer limited protection, and, while most employers are responsible and treat workers fairly, workers have little recourse when their working and living conditions are poor and unsafe. *El Sembrador* has become a voice advocating for greater support services for workers, working with community agencies, legal clinics, public health departments, politicians, other churches, university researchers and people in the labour movement.

El Sembrador is part of a growing network of agencies working together to see that every migrant worker in Canada has a respected place in the community with access to support services and fair treatment, a fair return for the essential contribution they are making to Canadian society. At the heart of the ministry of *El Sembrador*, is Jesus' reminder to us: "I was a stranger and you made me welcome." (Matthew 25:35). Out of that flows the gift of community.

Jean Lashley is the parish social ministry coordinator for three Roman Catholic parishes in Newmarket and Bradford, north of Toronto (St. John Chrysostom, St. Elizabeth Seton and Holy Martyrs of Japan). She facilitates a number of local church outreach programs, including *El Sembrador*, a ministry with Mexican agricultural workers in the Holland Marsh area. She also serves on the Refugee and Migrant Working Group of KAIROS.

Water in the Desert

The Reverend Dr. John Fife, retired pastor of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, founding member of Humane Borders, recipient of the E.H. Johnson Award for his cutting edge work on the sanctuary movement for Central American refugees, shared this anecdote:

"A couple of months ago, my wife and I hired a guy to do some work on our driveway. As soon as the crew arrived, the leader said to me, 'One of my guys wants to talk with you.' So I said OK, and the man came over to me, shook my hand, and gave me a big abrazo (hug). 'What's that all about?' I asked.

'Aren't you one of those guys who puts water out in the desert?'

I said Yes, I had helped with that.

And he said, 'It saved my life. I was lost, literally crawling on my hands and knees, when I came across one of your water stations, and that's the only reason I survived the desert. I just wanted to thank you.'

That kind of a conversation keeps you going for a long time!"

Humane Borders is a Tucson faith-based organization which maintains a network of more than 70 water stations through the Arizona borderlands. They have provided more than 65,000 gallons of life-saving water to migrants who are making a harrowing journey north in search of a better life. The water stations are maintained by hundreds of volunteers who check regularly to ensure the safety of the water and to pick up the trash and collection of personal items left behind by migrants heading north.

On the Border of Broken Dreams

by Rick Ufford-Chase

“I can risk everything and try to win a future for my kids, or I can stay at home and watch them die a slow death.”

Immediately on the Mexico side of the US/Mexico border at the Port of Entry in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, there’s a postage-stamp sized piece of dirt triangulated between Mexican immigration buildings. Squeezed tightly onto that little triangle of land are a mobile clinic run by volunteers from Red Cross, a beat up little mini-motor home, and a couple of white shade tarps with a dirt-covered sign offering aid to Mexicans who are being returned to their country after being apprehended by the US Border Patrol.

On a day when I visited in early June 2007, the temperature was just over one hundred degrees. There were flies everywhere, and men, women and children were sitting in plastic chairs, lying on cots, and standing in tight knots speaking Spanish in low voices as they considered their options. Three Mexican volunteers—former migrants themselves who now try to help others—looked worn out from the heat and the challenge of responding to eight hundred sick, hungry people a day with a sporadic flow of food donations and a few hundred gallons of warm water. A black and white

TV sits atop an old, donated refrigerator, with Mexican game shows softly playing in the background. Off to one side of the tent there is an older woman from Tucson who is quietly bandaging the bloody, blistered feet of an older man who looks totally used-up.

This is a *No More Deaths* migrant aid station, run by a coalition of governmental organizations from Mexico and non-profit groups from both sides of the border. Every half hour or so, another busload of folks with broken dreams is dropped off a tenth of a mile away on the U.S. side, and then the bus turns around and heads back for another load. Spend a few hours here, and the high stakes and hard realities of crossing the border in the Sonoran Desert become all too obvious.

What’s less obvious to most of us in the US and Canada are the conditions in Mexico and countries further south that would cause so many people to risk so much. Across Latin America, our church partners are tell us that they are watching



Photo: No More Deaths

No More Deaths Reppatriation Centre in Nogales, Sonora

the slow, inexorable death of the hopes and the livelihood of their people. Macro-economic forces that have been at play for several decades are resulting in parents who are confronted with ‘choices’ that aren’t really choices at all. One woman I met in a migrant center in Northern Mexico, who intended to try to cross the border with her two young children, said to me, “I can risk everything and try to win a future for my kids, or I can stay at home and watch them die a slow death.”

Parallels with Naomi’s migrant experience

In the first chapter of the book of Ruth, we’re told that Naomi and her husband and sons chose to leave Bethlehem because there was a great famine in the land. In other words, they moved to Moab for economic reasons. They did it to survive. Years later, after the death of her husband and her sons, Naomi and her daughters-in-law were faced with the same wrenching decisions faced by so many immigrants today who no longer belong in their places of origin or in their newly adopted homelands.

Though we often focus on the poetic beauty of Ruth’s declaration of devotion to her mother-in-law, Naomi’s words to her own people as she returns to her land after her migrant experience resonate far more deeply with the pain of those under the white tarps at the Nogales Port of Entry.

“Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi, when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me.”

Naomi’s calamity is a story shared by countless men and women we meet here on the border every day. Like Ruth, perhaps we are called to declare our allegiance and commit to stand with them wherever they may be.

Every migrant: a chance to stand with Jesus

After all, followers of Jesus have always been called upon to stand with the most disenfranchised among us. In the increasingly harsh security culture of the U.S. and Canada, no one is more marginalized than those who have no documents and who are migrating in order to survive. It is the responsibility of the Church to defy the fear of the dominant culture and insist that every migrant represents a chance to stand with Jesus, among the poorest of the poor, working tirelessly for the creation of the Reign of God.

Rick Ufford-Chase was the moderator of the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). He lives in Tucson, AZ, and serves as the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship and the border liaison for Christian Peacemaker Teams.



Rini Templeton

Prayer for my Migrant Brothers and Sisters

Jesus, full of love and mercy, watch over our sister and brother migrants. Have compassion and protect them as they suffer mistreatment and humiliation along their way, as they encounter distrust and marginalization. Touch with your goodness the hearts of all those who see them pass by. Help us to respect them and treat them with dignity.

Take care of their families until they return home. Grant them the grace to return safely, not with broken hearts but with their hopes fulfilled.

Prayer on the wall of the Community Centre for Migrants in Altar, Mexico

It is ironic and sad to think that Mexicans, who are barely making ends meet, cross the border in order to buy cheap products, goods that are made by Mexican workers who are paid less than a living wage.

In October 2005, my husband Matthew and I were part of an educational mission trip along the US/Mexico border led by BorderLinks. Our group of 14 was led by Rick Ufford-Chase, Moderator of the 216th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church (USA), and co-founder of BorderLinks. The trip was designed as an immersion experience to create dialogue among North Americans at the place where the First World and the Third World meet. We had opportunity to hear the stories of migrants planning to cross the border into the United States. The stories were poignant—and the people who told them were brave, and desperate.

A wall that divides more than nations

We crossed the border, going south, at Sasabe, Mexico. On that same day approximately 1,000 undocumented migrants crossed going north. In peak season we were told that 3,000 migrants attempt the trip every day. Many are returned by US Border Patrol; many make it; and tragically, many die in the unforgiving Arizona desert.

At another spot along the border, there is a steel wall that marks the border and separates the people of Nogales, Arizona, from the people of Nogales, Mexico. The 12 foot high wall is foreboding as it weaves its way across the top of a hillside. The wall divides more than nations. It divides people and marks a division of quality of life. On the south side of the wall the water is unsafe. On the north side, the homes are solid and well constructed. On the south side, many of the homes are made of scrap lumber and cardboard cobbled together to make a home. The wall divides access to and quality of education for children, healthcare, minimum wage, electricity, sewage systems, and other necessities of life. Life is different depending on which side of the border you live. No one who has the ability to cross the border would shop in Nogales, Mexico, when they know they can get better quality at a lower price in Nogales, USA. It is ironic and sad to think that Mexicans, who are barely making ends meet, cross the border in order to buy cheap products, goods that are made by Mexican workers who are paid less than a living wage. The wall divides people, but not commerce.

Since the creation of the free trade zone along the border, U.S. and Canadian companies have opened manufacturing facilities in Mexico. Farms and local industries that once supported Mexican communities are unable to compete. Migrants move north to find jobs, resulting in massive social and economic challenges. Faced with these concerns, along with scarce and low paying jobs, many Mexicans are unable to earn a living wage and cross the border looking for work. Due to increased militarization of the US border, particularly in urban areas, undocumented migrants have few options but to cross at dangerous places—like the desert.

Invisible walls and the role of the Church

The issues are complex and relevant for Canadian Christians. As the Church, in a time of globalization, we need to be aware of the ways that trade strategies and public policies affect us and our neighbours. As a global organization, the church can

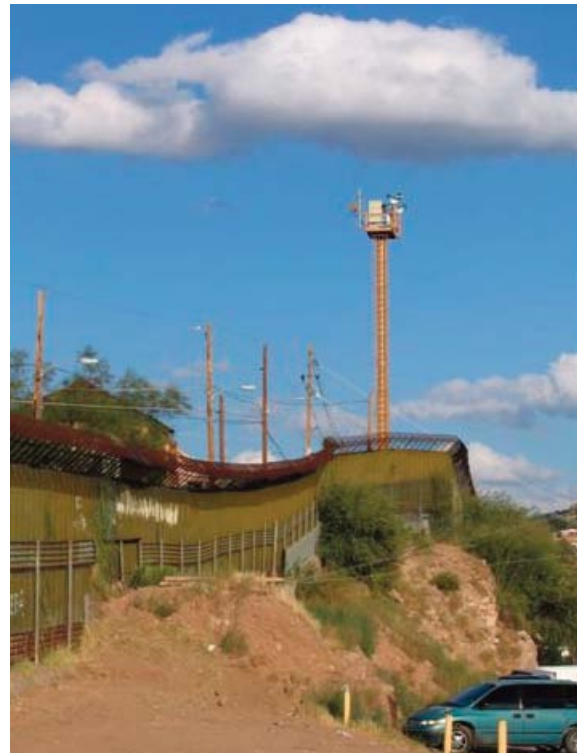


Photo: Jean Morris

listen carefully and speak prophetically, giving voice to those who have no voice, proclaiming the values of Christian faith in opposition to those economic values which exploit people for profit.

In Tucson, we met the Rev. John Fife, a Presbyterian minister who has been a leader in advocacy for migrants. John is a recipient of the E.H. Johnson Award from the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and has been instrumental in organizing churches to respond to the needs of migrants. The Humane Borders organization provides water stations, helping to alleviate dehydration for those walking across the desert. They also run Samaritan Patrol, sending out volunteers in 4-wheel drive vehicles to search for border crossers in trouble. Fife encourages congregations in North America to establish connections with churches in other parts of the world to learn about challenges and take down the barriers that separate us.

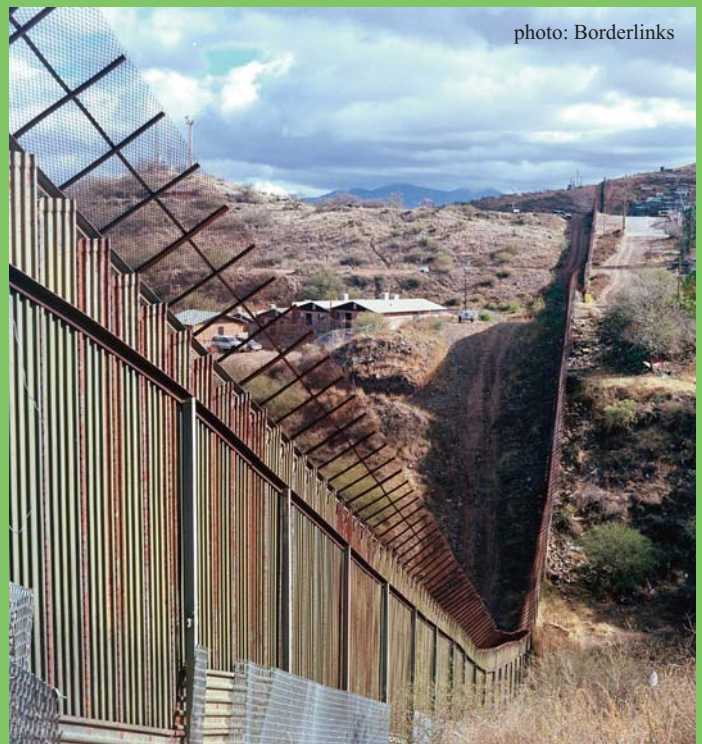
Borders do separate us. There are national borders, but there are also boundaries and borders in our communities which create ‘insiders and outsiders’. Borders are marked by physical walls, such as in Nogales, but the borders that exist with invisible walls are just as insidious. The Bible has lots of stories about insiders and outsiders, and the heroes are those who dare to cross borders to re-define relationships. Welcoming the stranger is a biblical theme that continues to be a relevant call for us to live our faith in Christ.

As Christians, we celebrate the divine border crossing in which God, in Christ, became human to dwell among us. Jesus crossed borders throughout his ministry—with those of other regions, with poor people and rich people, with women, children, and those with authority. His life began as a migrant. The rest of his life was spent making room for outsiders to be included in the fullness of God’s love.

The Reverend M. Jean Morris is the Vice President of Spirituality and Pastoral Care at the Bethany Care Society in Calgary, Alberta. Jean was Moderator of the 131st General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. A trip to Mexico was part of her Moderatorial year.

Migration policies set the boundaries between “us” and “them,” and tell us much about who we are as nations. We are defined by our treatment of non-citizens, and by the extent to which the protection of the rights of some comes at the expense of the rights of others. There can be no security for some if there is no security for all. We need to insist on a common standard of dignity and rights for everyone who is on the move, regardless of their place of origin and the reason for their dislocation, as well as for all those who live within our borders, regardless of status or category.”

Source: Excerpt from Inter Pares Bulletin Volume 28, Number 2, June 2006. Visit the Inter Pares website at www.interpares.ca for more information.



A Review of T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain*

by Derek Macleod

You have probably heard the Hebrew saying: *Open a book and you are a pilgrim at the gates of a new city*. It applies to T.C. Boyle's book of course, but the city you enter in this important little novel is not so much a new city but one more like your own, only as you have never wanted see it. Technically, the city where this story unravels is Los Angeles (Malibu county) a city where large numbers of undocumented workers (often referred to as illegal immigrants) both contribute to the local economy, but also to the fears and misgivings of those who benefit from this economy. *The Tortilla Curtain* explores this tension through the stories of a young Mexican couple who illegally enter the US in search of work and security; and a wealthy middle class American family whose lifestyle depends on these workers but who seem to care less about their welfare. Both couples pursue material comfort, meaningful work and a secure future but ultimately only jeopardize themselves, their neighbors and the land they share. It is a sad and at times surreal read as one encounters both the North American dream and its nightmarish underbelly.

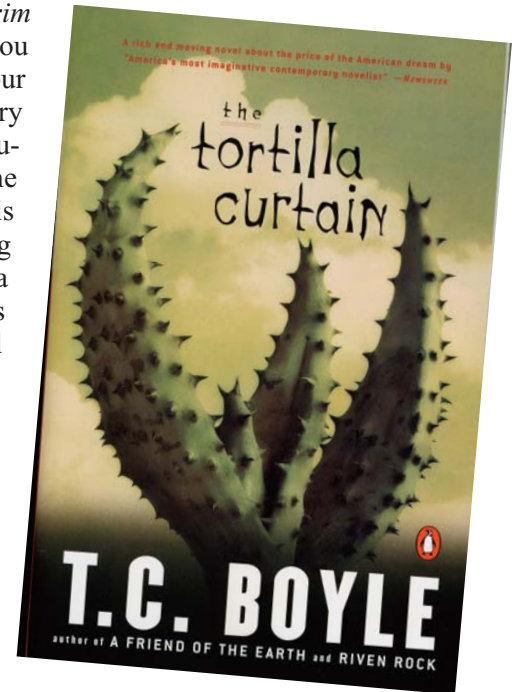
Ok, ok. We like our leisure reading to be a guilty pleasure but not a guilt inducer. If you have gotten this far in the review you might be asking why anyone would want to read this novel.

One very good reason is because in your town there are people newly arrived to Canada having left their homes in need of a better, safer, life. Some are welcomed, some maligned, and probably most are overworked and undervalued. Also in your town there are middle class folks who are doing the best they can with increasing costs and demands on their pursuit of, if not the good life, a better life. How are the two situations connected? In what way does our lifestyle shape the world around us? Can it change? Can I change?

You don't have to read this book of course, and the tragic story will no doubt continue. The next time you go to Wal-Mart ask yourself how a t-shirt can be so cheap? While enjoying the bounty of the Fall harvest consider the one who might have picked the vegetables that you enjoy in your Thanksgiving feast; where might they be? Notice too who cleans your local shopping mall and hospital every night. Chances are that a newly arrived immigrant is involved in these activities and chances are someone somewhere is being asked to sacrifice their quality of life for yours. That deserves our attention and reflection.

The Reverend Derek Macleod has recently moved from Montreal to Toronto to begin ministry at Glenview Presbyterian Church with his wife, Catherine, and daughters, Claire and Madeline. Derek is current convener of the PWS&D Committee and had the opportunity to visit the US/Mexico border through Borderlinks to hear about the issues facing migrant workers.

The Tortilla Curtain is available for purchase through The Book Room of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for \$22.15.
Phone 1-800-619-7301 or email bookroom@presbyterian.ca



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