

Dear Friends,

The Sonora Desert along the US-Mexico border between Arizona and Mexico, is an intimidating and inhospitable place. It is one of the largest and hottest deserts in North America. Yet, miraculously, there is a transformation in the early spring when the desert leaps to life and half of all the desert ephemerals splash a wild show of color across the arid landscape.

My first time trip into the Sonoran Desert was in 2003 when I went with a local pastor on a Humane Borders' water run. He and others made daily trips into the desert to put water out for migrants who might otherwise die of dehydration and heat exhaustion. I will never forget seeing a small child's handprint in dry desert soil far from any road, town or hospitality. I wondered what could drive a parent to bring their child to such a terrible and desperate place.

Recently I visited the same vast desert with participants on a BorderLinks delegation. We were accompanied by two members of the Samaritans who carried food, water and medical supplies for migrants lost or left behind by their group. We drove into a remote area called a "lay-up site" where migrants are forced to leave behind all personal items before they are either picked up by Border Patrol or their next "coyote" guide.

I never get over the assault of seeing hundreds of backpacks and pieces of clothing strewn around under trees where people rested. Most of the articles of clothing were shockingly small: **people-made-poor are made-small from malnutrition.** Discarded food containers, love letters, Bibles, blankets, medicines, toothbrushes and toothpaste littered the ground, along with shoes and clothing. Even life-saving breast cancer medication was left in the sand before the final push north.

BorderLinks trip leader Polita and I spotted a blue child's backpack. Perhaps because we both are mothers, we were drawn to it. In one compartment we found tiny Dora the Explorer pants and in another, Mom's makeup. On this trip, five years later, I understand why a mother would bring her child into the desert. The only possible answer is - of course - *because she has to. She crosses in order to survive.*

Why do people continue to risk everything to cross this desert? Why are so many people still losing life and limb in the desert? Why, with billions of dollars of investment in "border security" and policies that have a stranglehold on the 12+ million migrants currently living in the United States, do the deaths and human rights violations continue unabated?

These are questions we are committed to asking at BorderLinks. Through our immersion educational programs, we raise awareness and inspire action around global political economics which Latin American bishops have called "*savage capitalism.*" Individuals and groups come to BorderLinks to learn about immigration, and how we are called to seed hope in our communities and the world.

We are working on bold and new ways to “flower” in the desert. BorderLinks II “Corridor Trips” in El Paso/Juarez and San Diego/Tijuana will offer new opportunities for individuals who want a broader perspective on border issues. The October Chiapas delegation will explore the human face of global economics, immigration from Central America, Mayan spiritual practice, and liberation theology. Our summer program offers college credit for a deeper five-week experience in the borderlands.

We also are expanding the depth, breadth and vision of our Nogales Casa programs to include direct service, education, and action. We are proposing a meal program that ensures food security, education for healthy nutrition, sustainable food practices, and weekly grocery bags for the most needy in the Bella Vista community and beyond. A new program for the unemployed will teach computer and English skills. Plans are also underway for a community garden and labor and produce will be divided between the Casa lunch program and community volunteers. Possibilities for a free clinic, expanded day care program, and collaboration with the new women migrant’s shelter are also being considered.

This is the season of hope, of new life and renewed vision. It doesn’t take away the pain or suffering we witness along the way, but it keeps us going, keeps us moving toward a world in which people, within and across social borders, respect and care for each other, value and celebrate differences, and build healthy and just communities where everyone has equal opportunity for a full and dignified life.

We are humbled and happy to have made it through another year in the desert. We couldn’t have done it without you. We appreciate your accompaniment. Please keep our vision in your conversations, thoughts, and prayers. Whether you have ever written us a check, or sent one just last month, please consider making a contribution to a better world today.

In gratitude,

Rev. Delle McCormick
For the BorderLinks board and staff