

First Sunday of Advent
Nov. 30 & Dec. 1, 2019

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Report from the Border

Our trip to McAllen Tx and then to Matamoros, Mexico was humbling, distressful, and a poignant reminder of Mary and Joseph's search for a place to take them in.

Because of our government's Remain in Mexico immigration policy that began in June (formally and ironically called the Migrant Protection Protocols) the shelters along the US border have been emptied. So what we had hoped to see and had heard so much about, was only emptiness of facilities and frustration and concern from the volunteers who had established wonderful services for the asylum seekers after entering the US. But we had an opportunity to drive to Brownsville TX and then cross the border into Mexico where the asylum seekers had been stopped.

The first thing we saw when we crossed the border is asylum seekers waiting in line, sleeping on the ground, and sitting waiting to file their "credible fear" application for asylum. They wait days and are afraid to leave so as not to lose their place in line.

The tent camps just on the other side of the border are the result of the Remain in Mexico policy. It is estimated that 2500-3000 people are located at this US entry point alone.



These tent camps are replicated all along the border at all US entry points. The tents have been provided by Team Brownsville < <https://www.teambrownsville.org/>>, a group of 5 teachers that are trying to serve the asylum

seekers by providing breakfast and dinner (the only food they will have), obtaining and cleaning the 9 latrines and 6 showers and providing clothes and blankets. The communal washing stations have been recently installed by the city and serve the 2500-3000 refugees.



Bathing is also done in the Rio Grande. People fish in the river, which is the only way people can obtain their own food, without charity. The river is full of bacteria and is generally not the kind of water you would want your children near, much less in.

When you walk across the border, in addition to the tent camps, you see clothes hanging to dry on every discernable surface, on the barbed wire fence, trees and bushes.

Medical care is provided by volunteers from a “tent” which had the meagerest of medical supplies – certainly no medications. An asylum seeker from Cuba, who is also a doctor in his home country, provides some medical care.

Walking through the tent camps, we saw people trying their best to survive with dignity, building ovens out of clay dirt or digging a hole into the ground to make an oven, then taking branches from trees to burn for fuel. They built tables out of tree branches, to keep their



belongings out of the dirt and mud.



People are sleeping on the ground without ground cover or blankets. It had gotten down to 35 degrees on one of the nights we were there – and children and adults are sleeping on the ground without cover. It is impossible to bring much across the border because everything is taxed at 19% and the guards must see receipts of evidence that goods are new. When we crossed, we tied donated jackets around our waist and stuffed blankets into totes to get them across. The volunteers who were our guides were surprised we were not hassled, probably because we were a group of white people, not black or brown like so many of the volunteers.

It seems the new immigration policies are designed to make it so asylum seekers will fail. Asylum seekers are being given hearing dates of 12-15 months from now – meaning they could be living in these tent camps for all that time. The asylum seekers do not want to move to government shelters because they are afraid they will miss their hearing dates and they lack transportation to get back to the border station.

All Saints, St. Lucy's and our Church Reform Group (i.e. CTA), is exploring the development of a partnership with the Diocese on the other side of the border as well as working with the CTA group in McAllen TX. Donations to Team Brownsville is also an immediate way of helping. They cannot accept donations of food or clothing because it is so hard to take anything across.

The experience was more than sobering as these are people fleeing for their lives – only to be stopped after terrifically long and harrowing journeys and not being given an opportunity to even apply for asylum. I can't help but think about Christ's family being given a stable to sleep in. Not much different than here.

December 17, 2019