

THE
D E V I L ' S
H I G H W A Y
A True Story & LUIS ALBERTO URREA

Study Guide (4 week study)
Prepared by Illinois Maya Ministry

First Week (pp. 1-70); Ephesians 2:14-22; Exodus 22:21.

If possible, also distribute the copy of “Faith Based Values for Immigration Reform” to the class as an example of work done by an organization in Tucson, Arizona. (1A)

Second Week (pp. 71-142); Leviticus 25; “Trade Agreements-Effects of NAFTA and Foresights of FTAA”; “The Path to Poverty”

Third Week: (pp. 143-176); Hebrews 13:1-2; Illinois Conference Resolution

Fourth Week: (pp. 179-220); Luke 24:13-32; Two values for a more humane immigration policy with descriptions.

Throughout this curriculum the word “values” is used. For purposes of this curriculum, “values” are not defined as feelings or perceptions but as guiding principles or as “North Stars” for reflection and action. Within this curriculum then, “values” are understood as not only who we are but also describe where we are going.

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If possible, also distribute the copy of “Faith Based Values for Immigration Reform” to the class as an example of work done by an organization in Tucson, Arizona. (1A)

Materials needed:

- Bibles for everyone
- Marker board, chalk board, or newsprint with markers or chalk.
- A map of the nation of Mexico.
- A map of the state of Arizona.
- Highlighter
- Copy of “Faith Based Values for Immigration Reform” (<http://www.nomasmuertes.org/CallToAction.html>) asking for a more humane immigration policy. (1A).

Preparation:

- Make sure a Bible is set out for everyone.
- Place maps in a location where they can be seen by everyone.
- Have copy of “Faith Based Values for Immigration Reform” copied off for everyone in the class.
- Have copies of “The Path to Poverty” (1B); “Trade Agreements- Effects of NAFTA and Foresights of FTAA” (1C), handouts for next class ready to go.

1. Read Ephesians 2:14-22

2. Opening Prayer:

God of all peace, we ask that you might reconcile all humanity to you. Make us your holy dwelling place so that we are no longer strangers or aliens but members of your common household. Break down the walls between us. In Christ, make us one. Amen.

3. Introductions and Sharing

(If not all study members know one another, begin the discussion by asking each member to introduce themselves.)

Ask each member to share a time in their lives when they experienced hospitality (a time when you were a stranger and welcomed) in their lives.

4. Discussion

What sights, sounds, or smells were present in each hospitality experience?

(Write the reflections to this question in a column on the marker board/chalk board/newsprint)

Besides hospitality, what was the value expressed in each experience?

(On a separate place or page, write the reflections to this question in a column.)

5. Book Discussion

One of the questions this study will ask is how important the value of hospitality is to the Christian tradition and what borders or boundaries should keep us from offering hospitality to others. We will begin by looking at some of the borders or boundaries already created in our world.

As you have read, the migrants who are the subject of this book came from the Mexican state of Veracruz.

(Highlight the state of Veracruz on your Mexican map. Veracruz is a state that runs along the eastern seaboard of Mexico.)

(Highlight the state of Chiapas on your Mexican map. Chiapas is the southernmost state in Mexico and shares a border with Guatemala.)

We also know that many migrants come from the Mexican state of Chiapas. The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ has a partnership and relationship with the Roman Catholic Church in Chiapas, an agency that works with street children and their mothers in Chiapas (MELEL), an international observation group (Service International for Peace/SIPAZ), and an ecumenical center that is called the “greatest hope for peace in Chiapas (Institute for Intercultural Studies and Research/INESIN).”

One of the questions this study will also ask is why people would leave their homes and their families to try and cross the border at one of the worst parts of the Arizona desert.

(Highlight the area in Arizona on your state of Arizona map where this event took place. Reference the map at the beginning of the book.)

Militarizing and closing the United States/Mexico border through policies such as Operations Triple Strike, Hold the Line, Safeguard, Gatekeeper, Blockade and Rio Grande have forced migrants into a narrower and narrower funnel which treks through the worst part of the Arizona desert in what has now become a gauntlet of death. Since 1998, almost 3,000 people have died trying to cross the border from Mexico into the

United States. Some estimates have placed the number of undocumented people crossing the border at 3,000 a day.

What are your initial reflections in reading *The Devil's Highway*?

(As people share their reflections, as you hear them, write down subject headings and individual people who are involved in this story. For example:

Coyote Border Patrol
Mendez Mike F.)

After people share their initial reflections, ask if there are any more actors or players in this particular story or ongoing immigration story.

With whom, if anyone, do you identify in the story? Why? For whom do you have negative feelings? Why?

6. Handout “Faith Based Values for Immigration Reform” if not distributed before class.

Relate to class participants that these statements come from a faith based group called “No More Deaths” based in Tucson, Arizona. Have the class read each of the headings and discuss which values rhyme with their values and which do not and why. What values would they add to or subtract from this statement to make it their own?

(Record these values on a separate space or page)

6. Read Exodus 22:21

The birth story of the Jewish people, found in the Passover, reminds the Jewish people that “You shall not oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21). The way the Jewish people remembered the stranger or the alien in their midst was an indicator of their faithfulness to the Living God. Biblical theologian Ched Myers tells us that the words “stranger” and “alien” in the nomadic culture of ancient Israel may easily have been translated as “migrant.”

7. Closing Prayer:

Within our faith tradition and story is the knowledge that as we treat the migrant person, so we indicate our faithfulness to you, O Living God. Within the story of our country is a willingness to receive the poor, the huddled masses, those people yearning to breathe freely. How shall we live then according to the values you have given us as a church and nation? We do not want easy answers. We want your answers. We want to live according to your values. Amen.

8. Handouts for next class

- “The Path to Poverty” (1B)
- “Trade Agreements-Effects of NAFTA and Foresights of FTAA” (1C)

Second Week (pp. 71-142); Leviticus 25; “Trade Agreements-Effects of NAFTA and Foresights of FTAA”; “The Path to Poverty”

Materials Needed:

- Bibles for everyone
- Marker board, chalk board, or newsprint with markers or chalk.
- Markers or chalk
- “The Path to Poverty” handout (1B).
- Call for a More Humane United States Immigration Policy, Illinois Conference Resolution passed at the Illinois Conference Meeting in Elmhurst, Illinois, June 2006 (2A).

Preparation:

- Write a bulleted list with the following heading: Sabbath/Jubilee Story
 - God owns the land
 - God gives the land as an ancestral heritage for the shalom of the whole community
 - All—including slaves, servants, aliens, and the land—must be given rest and amnesty.
 - The land can and must be redeemed by family.
 - The land shall be returned and debts shall be forgiven so that people will not be oppressed.
- In a separate space, write a bulleted list with the following heading: Free Trade/Neo-liberal Economics
 - Cut tariffs and taxes
 - Cut agricultural subsidies
 - Cuts social spending
 - Opens up land ownership to highest bidder
 - Deregulates environmental and labor laws
- In a separate space, write out the speech of Tom Joad from the movie, *Grapes of Wrath* for the class to later read.

“I’ll be all around in the dark. I’ll be everywhere. Wherever you can look, wherever there’s a fight, so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever there’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. I’ll be there in the ways guys yell when they’re mad. I’ll be there in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry and they know supper’s ready, and when people are eatin’ the stuff they raise and livin’ in the houses they built, I’ll be there too.”

1. Read Leviticus 25

2. Opening Prayer

God of all grace, we ask that we might create enough space and rest in our communities so that all people might experience life, work, and the land as a gift. Set us all free to serve you. May we celebrate the freedom and joy you intend for us. Amen.

3. Sharing

If you have enough class members, pair members of the class up with one another. Ask members to share with one another to report back to the larger group. Ask them to share with one another a time when parents, relatives, a friend, or a colleague helped out with money, a job, a room, or housing to get them through a difficult time. What would have happened if this help had not been offered or given? Have each pair discuss what value was expressed in each experience. Let them know that the other person will then share with the larger group the other person's experience while both of them will share what values were represented in each story.

4. Biblical Values (referencing what has been written on chalk board, marker board, or newsprint)

The story of Sabbath and Jubilee begin with the understanding that the Hebrews were to treat the foreigner, the poor, the widow, the orphan, and finally, the land, with grace and compassion recognizing that they themselves were "once slaves in Egypt." Basic politics and economics flow out of these understandings:

- God owns the land
- God gives the land as an ancestral heritage for the shalom of the whole community
- All—including slaves, servants, aliens, and the land—must be given rest and amnesty.
- The land can and must be redeemed by family.
- The land shall be returned and debts shall be forgiven so that people will not be oppressed.

5. North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) values (passed on January 1, 1994)—referencing Sarah Seidel article.

- a. We have operated under a neo-liberal economic model defined as "free trade."
 - i. Cuts corporate tariffs and taxes (leaves nothing for government)
 - ii. Cuts agricultural subsidies (low-interest loans)
 - 1) These subsidies always provided for the poor in Mexico.
 - 2) The U.S. gives \$14 billion directly to agriculture. Canada does more. Mexico did not have a chance with their external debt.
 - 3) Quote from Mexican farmer, Erasto Diaz, Migrant from Ayoquezo: "They have really locked us up with NAFTA. NAFTA was the final straw that left all our people without work and all the land idle. We have been invaded by agricultural products from elsewhere—rice from China, corn from the U.S. These products are all much cheaper than we can produce and of far worse quality. We have completely lost our yellow corn—hardly anyone cultivates yellow corn now. But the most powerful effect is that our land is idle and many plots have been completely abandoned in Ayoquezo and much of Oaxaca. The prices have fallen so much that no one can afford to live off the land. You cannot even recover what you have invested—to say nothing of our labor. The drought has also affected us greatly. The net affect is that

the *campesino* cannot sew a crop and trust that from that crop his family will be able to eat.”¹

- 4) 1.3 million small farmers in Mexico were immediately driven off the land by the passage of NAFTA.²
- 5) Before NAFTA an 80 lb. bag of coffee cost 1400 pesos. After NAFTA, it cost 300-400 pesos. Mexico went from 60% rural to 20%.³
- iii. Cut social spending in Mexico (makes it tougher for individuals to pay off debt to bank)
 - 1) Health care and education now gone.
 - 2) Food stamps and welfare reform now over
- iv. Liberalizes land ownership.
- v. Deregulates environmental and labor laws
 - 1) Makes investment easier (don't have to abide by those inconvenient environmental or labor laws.
 - 2) No money left to enforce environmental or labor laws.

b. Review “The Path to Poverty” Handout (1B).

(Have a different person read each part of the flow chart.)

6. Discussion

What are the differences in values between the Bible and NAFTA?

(Write those differences down on a separate space as people relate them.)

Do those differences matter to you? Why or why not? What international economic, political, or environmental policies could be enacted to mirror Biblical values found in Leviticus 25?

7. Book Discussion

What initial reflections do you have about this week's reading? To what lengths would you go to feed your family? What could have been to save these men before they arrived at this point in their journey?

What comparisons could you make between this story in history and the dream of the American west portrayed in John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*?

Have the group read together Tom Joad's speech from the end of the movie version of *Grapes of Wrath*:

“I'll be all around in the dark. I'll be everywhere. Wherever you can look, wherever there's a fight, so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. I'll be there in the ways guys yell when they're mad. I'll be there in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready, and when people are eatin' the stuff they raise and livin' in the houses they built, I'll be there too.”

¹ Women's Edge Coalition, “NAFTA and the FTAA: Impact on Mexico's Agricultural Sector,” http://www.womensedge.org/components/com_kb/attachments/mexicocasestudyfactsheet.pdf

² Conversation with Rev. John Fife, pastor of South Side Presbyterian Church in Tucson Arizona.

³ Conversation with Tommy Bassett, advocate for more humane immigration policies in Tucson, Arizona.

Can you think of other historical parallels to this present situation?

8. Closing Prayer

We remember that so many Biblical stories begin with migrant people seeking a better life for their families, O God. Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Naomi, Jacob and Moses, and finally, the Holy Family sought grace and rest, freedom and life. How do we continue or to begin to live lives as Biblical people? Where does our journey begin? Walk with the migrant people in our time. Walk with us. Amen.

9. Handout for Next Class

Call for a More Humane United States Immigration Policy, Illinois Conference Resolution passed at the Illinois Conference Meeting in Elmhurst, Illinois, June 2006 (2A).

Third Week: (pp. 143-176); Hebrews 13:1-2; Illinois Conference Resolution

Materials needed

- Bibles for everyone.
- Call for a More Humane United States Immigration Policy, Illinois Conference Resolution passed at the Illinois Conference Meeting in Elmhurst, Illinois, June 2006 Handout. (2A)
- Marker board, chalk board, or newsprint.
- Markers or chalk

Preparation

- Have each ministry (BorderLinks; Samaritan Patrols; Humane Borders; No More Deaths) as a heading on a separate page or space along with the description of what they do. Reveal them as you present them to the class.

1. Read Hebrews 13:1-2

2. Opening Prayer

God of all peoples, we remember that you once lived in a tent so that you might be with your migrant people. Mary welcomed Jesus into the world as a migrant. We pray for people all over the world who live as strangers in a strange land, forced to leave the homes they love because of poverty and injustice. May we see in strangers opportunities for our own growth and well-being. Amen.

3. Sharing

Ask folks to pair up with someone different than the last class. Let them know that they will share experiences with the larger group. Ask pairs to share with one another an experience of when they were helped by a stranger or when a negative initial impression led to a friendship in the future.

4. Discussion

Read through the Call for a More Humane United States Immigration Policy, Illinois Conference Resolution passed at the Illinois Conference Meeting in Elmhurst, Illinois, June 2006 (3A) together. After the class reads through the resolution, ask for the values expressed by the resolution.

(Write the values of the resolution down on the marker board, chalk board, or newsprint.)

5. Ministries

Some folks are already acting upon faith values to speak to the situation on the border. Here are four faith-based organizations that are already at work in the Tucson, Arizona area.

- BorderLinks (www.borderlinks.org)

What do they do? They offer experiential educational seminars along the border focusing on the issues of global economics, militarization, immigration, and popular resistance to oppression and violence. The Executive Director of BorderLinks, Rev. Delle McCormick, once served as the Illinois Conference missionary to Chiapas, Mexico.

Mission:

- To build relationships and understanding between North and Latin Americans
- To encourage a shared analysis of the implications of the global economy
- To "Capacitate" leaders on both sides of the border who work together to foster healthy communities locally and internationally

- Humane Borders (www.humaneborders.org)

What do they do?: Humane Borders, motivated by faith, offers humanitarian assistance to those in need through more than 70 emergency water stations on and near the U.S.-Mexican border.

Mission:

Deployment of water saves lives and invites public discourse: They want to legalize the undocumented migrants now working and living in the United States; create a responsible guest worker program; increase the number of visas for Mexican nationals; demilitarize border; support economic development in Mexico; provide more federal aid for local medical service providers, law enforcement and adjudication, land owners and managers. They invite federal, state, tribal and county organizations and agencies, as well as individuals, churches and humanitarian groups, to join in and support our life-saving efforts. They welcome all persons of good faith.

- No More Deaths (www.nomasmuertes.org)

What do they do? Guided by the failed militarized border enforcement strategy, a coalition of groups established practical means to aid migrants driven away from urban crossing centers into the life-endangering remote areas of the desert. The coalition determined that an around-the-clock, non-violent, humanitarian physical presence in the desert would be the single most effective approach. They attempt to provide water, food, and medical assistance to migrants walking through the Arizona desert; to monitor US operations on the border and work to change US policy to resolve the "war zone" crisis on the border; and to bring the plight of migrants to public attention.

Mission:

They have recruited and continue to recruit aid programs as well as supporting already-existing ones, by interfaith, humanitarian, peaceful, solidarity-building events, and by establishing camps for assistance, outreach and border monitoring. Under the No More Deaths umbrella, participating groups—staffed by volunteers--abide by clear medical and legal protocols and worked in concert to save human lives.

- The Samaritan Patrol (www.samaritanpatrol.org)

What do they do? They patrol the desert on a daily basis during the hot months continuing the ancient Southwest tradition of hospitality to travelers. At least one member of each patrol is a fluent Spanish speaker, and one is, ideally, a medical professional. Patrols carry water, food, emergency medical supplies, communication equipment, maps and individual traveler-packs containing items necessary to survive in the desert.

Mission:

- To save lives and relieve suffering of migrants in southern Arizona
- To educate ourselves and others about the plight of migrants
- To restore hospitality and compassion along our border
- To encourage elected leaders to humanize border policy

If your congregation was to support one of these ministries which one would it be and why?

(Write down responses on separate space or page.)

6. Book Discussion

Any reflections about the reading for this week? As you read the description of what happened to the walkers as a result of heat exhaustion, was there any point where you had to stop reading? What part of the heat exhaustion do you think would be the worst?

What part of this story makes you the saddest?

What part of this story gives you the most hope?

7. Values for a New Immigration Policy

If you were to write a more humane United States immigration policy, what values would that immigration policy include?

(Write down responses on separate space or page and push for more response.)

8. Assignment for next class

Ask each class member to take two of the values listed and define or describe each of those values with a paragraph each to present to the whole class next week. Encourage each class member to define or describe those values informed by their faith stories or perspective. Also ask each class member to make enough copies of their descriptions to distribute to the rest of the class for next session.

9. Closing Prayer (From The National Farm Worker Ministry, Harvest of Justice Table Prayers)

Dear God, every day, men, women, and children are making the perilous journey north across the U.S. border—a border established by people, not by you. We pray, God, for your help in tearing down the borders we have built around our own hearts, that we may see you in each person, and that we may learn to love and welcome each of your children as members of one people, one world, one God. Amen.

Fourth Week: (pp. 179-220); Luke 24:13-32; Two values for a more humane immigration policy with descriptions.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles for everyone
- Marker board, chalk board, or newsprint with markers or chalk.
- Markers or chalk
- Handout “Facts and Figures” (4A) for everyone

Preparation:

- Print out “Closing Prayer” for the class to say in unison.

Show me the suffering of the most miserable,

So I may know my people’s plight.

Free me to pray for others,

For you are present in every person.

Help me to take responsibility for my own life,

So that I can be free at last.

Grant me the courage to serve others,

For in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience,

So that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration,

So that the Spirit will be alive among us.

Let the Spirit flourish and grow,

So that we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice,

For they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hate us,

So we can change the world. Amen.

- If you choose to do Communion, have the elements prepared and ready along with any people or liturgy you would need according to your church’s tradition.
- BorderLinks delegation opportunity through Illinois Maya Ministry.(4A)

1. Read Luke 24:13-32

2. Opening Prayer

God of our highest values, remind us of our own stories. Remind us that as the disciples on the road to Emmaus invited a stranger to walk with them, they learned from that stranger the important lessons of faith. Remind us that as the disciples granted that stranger hospitality, they saw the Risen Christ as he broke bread with them. Make our hearts burn with passion for you through our time together. Teach us. Turn aside from your walking to be with us. Break bread with us. Amen.

3. Sharing

If not already distributed, ask each class member to distribute the two values they chose for a more humane immigration policy. Then ask each class member to read through their descriptions for the whole class to hear.

(Write the values each class member chose in a column on marker board/chalk board/newsprint.)

4. Book Discussion

(Hand out “Facts and Figures” taken from the reading for this week.)

Have each class member take turns reading bulleted points from the handout. What were your reactions to these facts and figures when you read them this week? Any other reflections from the reading this week? What did you think of the book as a whole?

5. What is our next step?

What next steps can the class take for further action? (As facilitator/leader of the class, you are perhaps the best person to judge what energy/passion is now available for further action. You may want to put the following possibilities in front of the class for further action.)

- Share your learnings from the book and the class with the rest of the congregation through worship, bulletin, newsletter.
- Invite the congregation to a movie night watching “El Norte” (not a kid friendly movie due to graphic content and language.)
- Compile the values from the class into a letter that will be sent to your local Congressional representatives.
- Invite someone from Illinois Maya Ministry (Contact the Chair, Rev. Michelle Prentice-Leslie at Leslie732@aol.com) to speak to your class or the congregation on the topic of a more humane immigration policy.
- Participate in a BorderLinks delegation (www.borderlinks.org) with your church or with Illinois Maya Ministry in April 2007 (April 16-20, 2007, Contact Rev. Mike Mulberry at mike@community-ucc.org). (4A)
- Support one of the ministries along the border like Humane Borders (www.humaneborders.org) once a month, for a year, by providing what it would cost them for a day’s gas in the desert.
- Do research to find out what ministries are available in your local community or area for undocumented workers and volunteer at this ministry or invite the leader of the ministry into your congregation to learn more.
- Participate, write, and vote according to deep Biblical values of knocking down borders, Sabbath and jubilee, hospitality, and social justice.

6. Communion according to your church’s tradition or using tortillas and coffee to celebrate our sharing with God and with one another.

7. Closing Prayer (United Farm Workers Prayer written by César Chávez)

Show me the suffering of the most miserable,

So I may know my people’s plight.

Free me to pray for others,
 For you are present in every person.
Help me to take responsibility for my own life,
 So that I can be free at last.
Grant me the courage to serve others,
 For in service there is true life.
Give me honesty and patience,
 So that I can work with other workers.
Bring forth song and celebration,
 So that the Spirit will be alive among us.
Let the Spirit flourish and grow,
 So that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice,
 For they have given us life.
Help us love even those who hate us,
 So we can change the world. Amen.

APPENDIX

1A

Faith Based Principles for Immigration Reform

Recognize that the current Militarized Border Enforcement Strategy is a failed policy. Since 1998 more than 2000 migrants - men, women, and children - have lost their lives in the deserts of the US-Mexico borderlands trying to make their way into the United States. These tragic and unnecessary deaths must stop. The border blockade strategy has militarized the US-Mexico border, which drives migrants into remote desert regions yet has failed to stem the flow of immigrants into the United States. Further, the fragile desert environment has sustained severe damage as a result of migrants moving through remote desert regions and responding enforcement patrols. Indeed, a militarized border control strategy has never in United States history successfully stemmed the flow of immigrants. We recognize the right of a nation to control its borders, but enforcement measures must be applied proportionately, humanely, and with a conscious effort to protect the people and the land.

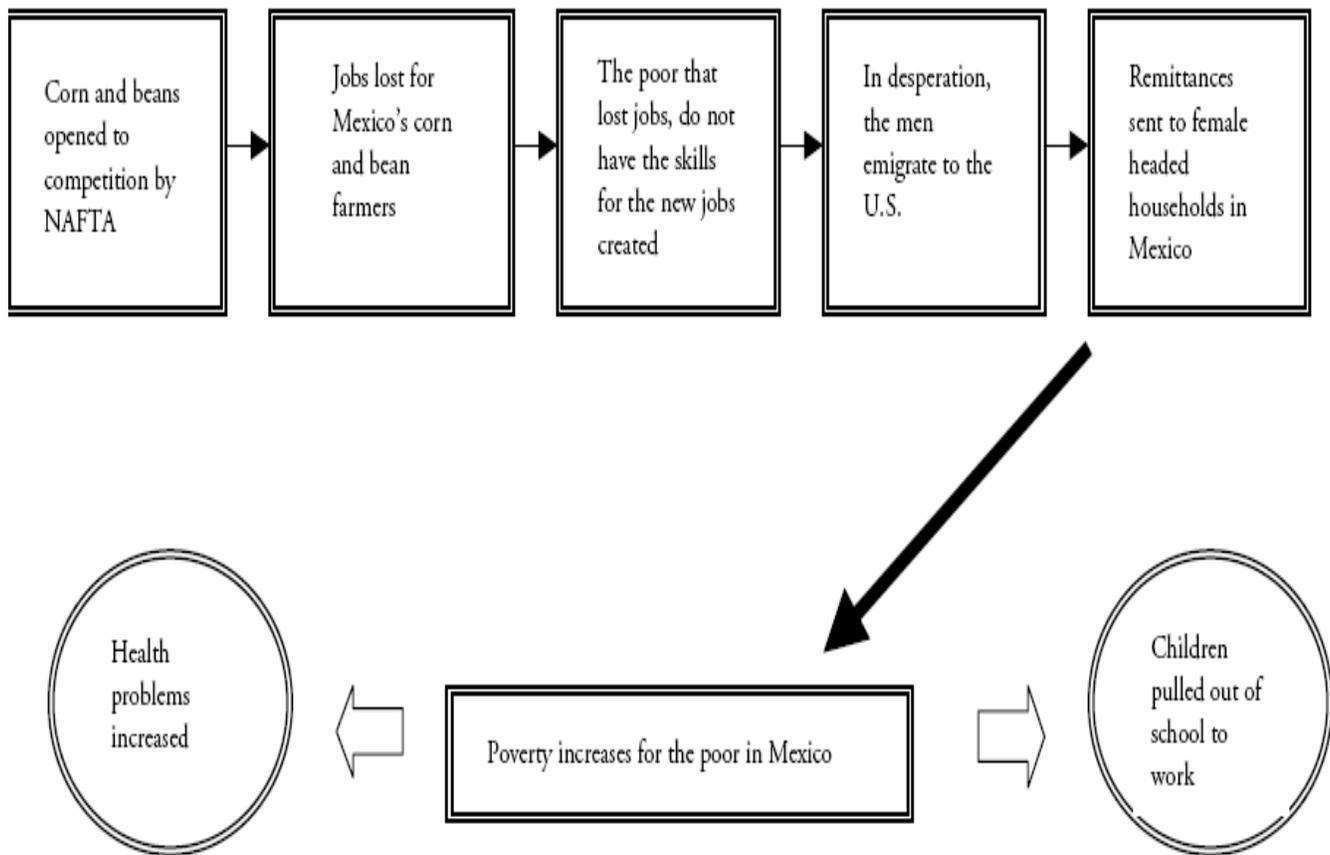
Address the status of undocumented persons currently living in the US. Workers and their families currently living in the US must have access to a program of legalization that offers equity-building paths to permanent residency and eventual citizenship for workers and their families. Legalizing the undocumented workforce helps stabilize that workforce as well as their families. A stable workforce strengthens the country.

Make family unity and reunification the cornerstone of the US immigration system. Migrants enter the United States either to find work or to reunite with family members, yet the arduous and lengthy process forces families to make potentially deadly choices. Families must be allowed to legally and timely re-unify as well as to immigrate together as a unit.

Allow workers and their families to enter the US to live and work in a safe, legal, orderly, and humane manner through an Employment-Focused immigration program. International workers' rights must be recognized and honored in ways that protect: the basic right to organize and collectively bargain, individual workers' religious freedoms, job portability, easy and safe travel between the US and homelands, achievable and verifiable paths to residency, and a basic human right of mobility.

Recognize that root causes of migration lie in environmental, economic, and trade inequities. Experiences of Mexico and countries further south demonstrate that current trade and aid strategies that are based on greed and lack of basic respect deeply and negatively impact workers, their families, and the environments in migrants' homelands. This is forcing a quest-for-survival based migration of unparalleled proportions. International agreements must be negotiated in ways that build mutual and just relationships. Such agreements must be designed to meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations' abilities to meet their needs. New strategies must include incentives for the public and private sectors to invest in economic and environmental repair and sustainable development in the sending communities.

The Path to Poverty



The Women's Edge Coalition, "NAFTA and the FTAA: Impact on Mexico's Agriculture Sector," <http://www.womensedge.org/documents/mexicocasestudyfactsheet.pdf>, p. 3.

Trade Agreements - Effects of NAFTA and Foresights of FTAA

Reflections from Sarah Seidel, volunteer with Border Links, Arizona

In January of 1994, I was in the 9th grade. I was finishing my last year at Junior High and still focusing on me and what was happening in my small world. I was taking my second year of Spanish and still trying to figure out the difference between the verbs *ser* and *estar* (I must admit I still have troubles with these). I was applying to an exchange program to spend six weeks in Costa Rica. I remember that some time during this period in my life, my friend Meghan wrote a paper examining NAFTA for one of our classes. I wrote about something else – something easier for my mind to grasp. This is all that I remember about the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement. In subsequent years, I knew the agreement existed, but did not know or feel the effects (good or bad). Currently plans are underway to expand NAFTA to include all of the Americas, the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Cuba is excluded from FTAA. (For those like me who are unknowledgeable of the events leading up to NAFTA there is a little time line of key economic and the border events between United States of America and Mexico courtesy of the BorderLinks Reading Packet found at the end).

Almost every day working along the borderlands I see effects of the NAFTA agreement.

Effects of NAFTA...

1. Tax Breaks for Foreign Business – NAFTA provides for tax free shipment of raw goods and merchandise in between partner countries. In addition, US and Canadian businesses are encouraged to open factories (maquiladoras or maquilas) in Mexico with exemption from taxes. As a part of NAFTA all raw materials for the factories are shipped into Mexico and all finished products are shipped back out to the country of origin. Some of the ways that this part of the agreement effects border communities like Ambos Nogales/Both Nogales are:

In Nogales Arizona there are just fewer than 25,000 people, many are families of border patrol agents stationed in that sector. In Nogales Sonora Mexico the population is over 200,000 people. The infrastructure budget for Nogales Sonora is one tenth of that of Nogales Arizona, none of the 150+ maquiladoras in Nogales Sonora pay taxes to support the city or state that they are located in. This is part of the provisions of NAFTA. Due to inflated prices in Nogales Sonora, most Nogalenses who have a border crossing card shop for food and clothing in Nogales Arizona. This continues to put money back into US systems instead of supporting small businesses in Mexico.

Also in Nogales Sonora there is a train passes through town multiple times during the day. The train carries finished products from inside of Mexico to the US. Many of the train cars contain vehicles from the Ford maquiladora in Hermosillo Sonora, vehicles such as the Focus and the new Futura. These new vehicles are for citizens of the USA, not for Mexicans who can barely afford to put gas in their old VW bug or Toyota pick-

up. The train not only stops business and divides a city, but it also does nothing to support the community it divides. The train tracks that run the length of the city, from the border with the US south through downtown to the road to Hermosillo. When this train is crossing through the city of Nogales, Sonora, the city is cut in half and all travel to the other side of downtown is suspended until the train has passed. This 30-45 minute delay is an inconvenience for visitors, but for the people of Nogales it is a daily frustration. A project is currently underway to build a bridge across the tracks for traffic to travel on, but the work is slow with few dollars for infrastructure.

2. Cheap Labor – Another draw for US and Canadian businesses to relocate factories into Mexico is cheap labor. The average pay for a maquila worker in Nogales is just under 50 pesos a day (\$4.35) with bonuses they may earn up to 400 or 500 pesos a week (\$35 or \$43). If this is compared to the minimum wage in the US (national minimum wage is \$5.15/hr), that is a difference of \$165 per person per week.

This adds to the high unemployment due to labor and manufacturing jobs being sent over the border where labor is cheaper and environmental standards are not as strict. As the economies of the United States and Canada fluctuate, so does the economy in Mexico. When 9/11 paralyzed the economy in the US, the maquilas in Mexico laid off workers in droves. The saying goes that when the US catches a cold, Mexico comes down with the flu. Unfortunately for Mexican maquila workers, many of these jobs did not return. Looking for even cheaper labor, many US companies used this opportunity to relocate the factories again to countries in Asia. Unfortunately it is not only the CEO who is looking for more money, but also us, the shareholders, who demand more profits and a better return on our investments.

I often wondered why someone would leave their farm in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, or other southern state in Mexico to work in a maquila thousands of miles away from family and friends. But the reasons are simple – it makes no sense to continue to work a farm that gives no profit and does not feed your children or pay for their education. As part of the preparations for NAFTA the US and Mexico had two different strategies of preparation. The US prepared by increasing agricultural subsidies to farmers, Mexico prepared by stripping the long standing agricultural subsidies. With the government no longer purchasing corn and beans from Mexican farmers, they had to lower the price of their corn. In addition, after the passage of NAFTA, the Mexican markets became flooded with corn and other food products from the US that could be picked, processed, and shipped quicker and cheaper. So in order to provide for their family, lifetime farmers moved north to work in factories and in the industries that support the maquilas. These imported commodities also send their profits back to their country of origin instead of helping to support the Mexican community.

3. Migration – The most visible effect of NAFTA is the migration that results from unequal partnerships. When considering a partnership such as NAFTA or the European Union, each partner considers what they will receive from the partnership and what they are willing to give to the partnership. All that Mexico had to offer to the partnership was cheap labor. Mexico gained maquilas for its people to work in, but lost jobs in the

agricultural industry. Between the jobs lost in agriculture and the recent jobs lost for maquilas moving over to Asia, the unemployment has skyrocketed in Mexico. So the migration continues northward. Part of the US preparation for NAFTA was building a wall between the major points of entry between Mexico and the US. The wall was built not to keep people out of the US, but to keep people in Mexico. If everyone left Mexico, there would be no one to work in the maquilas and no one to buy the US products shipped down to Mexico.

In Altar, a center and meeting point for border crossers and desert walkers, I have talked with fishermen from the coast of Sonora and farm workers from Chiapas who are looking to cross the border into the United States because they can no longer feed their families in their hometowns. As many as 2000 people can be crossing the desert each day. I have heard stories of people who are injured and die trying to cross the desert into Arizona. Of people who are raped or deserted by coyotes (people smugglers), people who live in fear each day because they don't have the right documentation, people who avoid going to the doctor when sick because they have no money to pay for insurance and might get reported to immigration if they are found out.

In the US and Canada there are migrants living everywhere, some have been there for over 20 years, some arrived yesterday. Most have arrived with the help of friends and family already in the US. Many still owe money to their coyote. Most would like to return home to Mexico after they earn enough money to build their home, put their children through school, or just to supplement their income until they are able to afford to farm their land again. But as it becomes more difficult and more expensive to cross the border, more people are choosing to stay in the US because they may not have another opportunity to return later. Families are separated for years instead of months. Currently money sent back to Mexico from family members in the US is the second highest source of income for Mexico, the highest is oil.

Many people in Arizona and other border states have complaints about the high cost of migration. I read in the paper about hospitals closing due to the high cost of treating people without insurance and/or without documentation. People who are caught by the border patrol and require medical attention are taken to the nearest hospital and dropped off. If the border patrol were to arrest these individuals, then the US government would then have to pay the hospital bill. But the contributions of migrant workers are often forgotten about. Migrant workers work jobs that few US citizens would consider taking. They provide the base positions and work for the rest of the economy. They catch and pluck chickens, pick fruit, clean homes, care for children and build buildings and homes, among other jobs. Migrant workers increase the number of consumers in the US, purchasing food, clothes, and TVs and paying for rent, cable, and electricity. Studies have also estimated that undocumented workers contribute between \$150 and \$300 billion per year to the US Gross Domestic Product (Devil's Highway pg. 217).

Talking with Mexican acquaintances, the blame isn't only on the US, the Mexican government also allowed itself to be taken advantage of. A Mexican co-worker believes that the Mexican government knew what would happen and just did not prepare for it.

And the US and Canada took advantage of the situation. So where does this leave us? What should be done about NAFTA? The agreement can not be simply undone, as that would create more problems and increased unemployment. But changes can be made before more damage is done – hopefully before the FTAA is signed to spread the results to every other country in the Americas. Maybe we could take some lessons from the European Union? Unfortunately I do not have the answers. But I would be curious to hear your thoughts and ideas. We always have more to learn, and I learn more and more each day that I work and live in the borderlands. Thanks for listening. You all are in my thoughts and prayers often. Ryan and I appreciate your prayers as well.

Love,
Sarah

Time Line:



1900 less than 100,000 people live along the border between Mexico and the USA.

1917 – 1933 increased immigration and population along the border due to need for labor during WWI as well as trafficking of illegal goods during prohibition.

1933 – 1940 Great Depression – high unemployment in the USA, massive deportations of Mexican laborers.

1940 – 1949 Agricultural programs expand in southern California and four northern states in Mexico due to irrigation.

1942 – 1964 Braceros program is implemented and active. Braceros program allows for temporary legal immigration for agricultural laborers from Mexico to the USA.

1964 Braceros program is suspended due to technological innovations and worker rights movements for better wages and working conditions.

1965 Program for the Industrialization of the Border is created by the Mexican government. This program allows for land ownership, 100% control of businesses, and exemption of tariffs, taxes, and other governmental controls within 21 kilometers of the USA/Mexico border. Companies who take part in this program become known as maquiladoras.

1980 7 million people live along the border.

1982 Mexico's debt crisis explodes and later spreads to all of Central America

1986 USA implements the Immigration Reform and Control Act to restrict immigration. 3 million undocumented immigrants are legalized, 2.3 million of which are Mexican.

1987 Mexican president Salinas takes office and implements many reforms in preparation for NAFTA including removal of agricultural subsidies and extending borderland economic policies to the entirety of Mexico. Around the same time the USA is also making preparations which include increasing agricultural and other industry subsidies.

1994 January 1 US, Mexico, and Canada sign NAFTA. The Zapatistas start their uprising in southern Mexico on the same day, which is no coincidence.

Today over 10 million people live along the USA/Mexico border.

CALL FOR A MORE HUMANE UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION POLICY

SUMMARY

This Resolution calls for congregations and pastors of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ to study immigration and border issues through the coming year, especially by viewing of the movie, "El Norte" and the reading of the book "The Devil's Highway" by Luis Alberto Urrea.

This Resolution also calls congregations and pastors of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ to advocate for a more humane immigration policy, reflective prayer, and earnest study; grass roots organization; delegations which develop issue awareness, and appeals to local, state, and national legislators and representatives.

BACKGROUND

Through its economic, social, and environmental policies, the United States has precipitated an even greater migration of poor folk from Mexico and Latin America into the United States. Free trade policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which remove government protections, dry up low interest loans and subsidies, lower prices of goods, allow land to be purchased by wealthier people or organizations, and deregulate labor and environmental laws, leave many families with terrible choices. Many individuals must decide whether to starve at home with their families or leave their families to seek out employment in the United States.

Militarizing and closing the United States-Mexico border through policies such as Operations Triple Strike, Hold the Line, Safeguard, Gatekeeper, Blockade and Rio Grande have forced migrants into a narrower and narrower funnel which treks through the worst part of the Arizona desert in what has now become a gauntlet of death. Since 1998, almost 3,000 people have died trying to cross the border from Mexico into the United States. Some estimates have placed the number of undocumented people crossing the border at 3,000 a day.

Meanwhile, the United States already has living within its borders ten (10) to twelve (12) million undocumented workers with no registration of their identity or location. These undocumented workers have very little access to basic rights of assembly, organization, religious freedom, and the basic human right of mobility.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

We are all on this sojourn together. We are told in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2:14-22) that Christ knocks down every wall and hostility. Solutions which call for more walls and an increasingly militarized border run counter to this evangelical proclamation.

The birth story of the Jewish people, found in the Passover, reminds the Jewish people that “You shall not oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21). The way the Jewish people remembered the stranger or the alien in their midst was an indicator of their faithfulness to the Living God. Biblical theologian Ched Meyers tells us that the words “stranger” and “alien” in the nomadic culture of ancient Israel may easily have been translated as “migrant.” So within our faith tradition and story is the knowledge that as we treat the migrant person, so we indicate our faithfulness to the Living God.

In Sabbath and Jubilee mandates, found within the Levitical code, Israelite people were again reminded that they were to treat the resident alien with respect and compassion, as they themselves were once resident aliens in Egypt. Basic assumptions flow out of the Sabbath and Jubilee mandates which are central to this understanding: God owns the land; God gives the land as ancestral heritage and for the shalom of the whole community; all, including slaves, aliens, servants, and the land, are to be given rest and amnesty; the land can and is to be redeemed by family whenever possible; periodically, the land is to be returned to its original stewards, and debts are to be forgiven, so that people will not fall into oppression and slavery. These principles define the Jewish people and Christ’s ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness. Personal and national policies which treat the land as a commodity to be bought and sold, treat the resident alien without compassion and mercy, and ask Christians not to help those found wounded alongside the road of life cut across the very heart of our tradition.

We also remember that Mary, Joseph, and their infant child were migrants. While Mary was still pregnant, they traveled to Bethlehem because the economic policies of the Roman Empire dictated that travel. To escape persecution and death, the Holy Family left Bethlehem and migrated to Egypt.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS many of us are in local churches and communities where we are aware of migrant peoples, but largely unaware of their personal, communal, and national stories; and

WHEREAS since 1998 close to 3,000 migrants – men, women, and children – have lost their lives in the deserts of the United States-Mexico borderlands while trying to make their way in the United States and in locations throughout the State of Illinois; and

WHEREAS the border blockade strategy has militarized the United States-Mexico border, driving migrants into remote desert regions, yet has failed to stem the flow of immigrants into the United States and into several farms, towns, and cities within the State of Illinois; and

WHEREAS the fragile desert environment has sustained severe damage as a result of migrants and responding enforcement patrols moving through remote desert regions; and

WHEREAS a militarized border control strategy has never in United States history successfully stemmed the flow of immigrants; and

WHEREAS approximately ten to twelve million undocumented workers and their families currently living the United States are pressured to live covertly, without rights, and in vulnerable situations all over the United States, and this population is growing larger in the State of the Illinois; and

WHEREAS current immigration policy forces upon migrant families potentially deadly choices which separate and dislocate them from one another, precluding free travel and mobility to return to their families; and

WHEREAS migrant workers and their families enter the United States to live and work, and the current immigration policy makes that passage dangerous, illegal, disorderly, and inhumane, with very few of the basic rights afforded to all workers under international law; and

WHEREAS the root causes of this migration lie in environmental, economic, and trade inequities between the United States, Mexico, and all of Latin America, policies which reduce tariffs and taxes that would support the poor in Mexico and Latin America; eliminate agricultural subsidies and low-interest loans for the poor in Mexico and Latin America while keeping those subsidies in the United States in Canada; reduce social spending for health care, food stamps, and welfare reform in Mexico and Latin America; liberalize land ownership policies, thus limiting the ability of the poor in Mexico and Latin America to own or share in the land; deregulate environmental and labor laws in Mexico and Latin America; and limit the rights of Mexican and Latin American workers to protest or seek remedies for wrongs done to them; and

WHEREAS there is a large population of undocumented workers, and there are many families suffering from these situations in the State of Illinois;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that congregations and pastors of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ, as a Still Speaking God communion, study the immigration issue through the viewing, discussion, and reflection on the movie "El Norte" and the reading, discussion, and reflection on the book, "The Devil's Highway" by Alberto Urrea.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Illinois Maya Ministry, a ministry in the Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ, offers itself as a resource, to share experiences and wisdom gained from IMM's 20+ year history of travel to Guatemala, Mexico and the U.S. border and the relationships that have grown out of these opportunities, to help local churches learn about a faith-based response to immigration.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that congregations and pastors of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ pursue and advocate for a more humane and Biblically based immigration policy, one focused on Sabbath and Jubilee principles which would include:

- ⊕ Recognizing that the current Militarized Border Enforcement Strategy is a failed policy;
- ⊕ Addressing the status of undocumented persons currently living in the United States and the State of Illinois with a program of legislation that offers equity-building paths to permanent residency and eventual citizenship for workers and their families, to stabilize the workforce and strengthen our country's economy;
- ⊕ Making family unity and reunification the cornerstone of the United States immigration system so that families may be allowed to legally reunify as well as to immigrate together as a unit, so that we do not cause irreparable damage to a basic unity of human community for generations;
- ⊕ Allowing workers and their families to enter the United States to live and work in a safe, legal, orderly and humane manner through an Employment-Focused immigration program that guarantees basic international workers' rights to organization, collectively bargaining, job portability, religious freedom, easy and safe travel between the United States and their homeland, achievable and verifiable paths to residency, and a basic human right of mobility;
- ⊕ Recognizing that root causes of migration lie in environmental, economic, and trade inequities which are based on assumptions of scarcity and self-interest, rather than on a vision of Shalom in which God calls us to act with compassion and justice, in order to foster the common good.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that congregations and pastors of the Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ, advocate and pursue this more humane and Biblically-centered policy through reflective prayer and earnest study, grass roots organization, delegations which develop issue awareness, and through appeals to local, state, and national legislators and representatives.

Resolution passed at Illinois Conference Meeting, Elmhurst, Illinois, June 2006.

Facts and Figures from The Devil's Highway

The Center for Immigration Studies in 2001

“The estimated lifetime net fiscal drain (taxes paid minus services used) for the average adult Mexican immigrant is negative **\$55,200.**”

Some other facts and figures:

If these are poor folks who make \$4.50 an hour and there are, conservatively, eight million undocumented workers, remember that they pay state and federal taxes and social security. They are tapped for 36 million dollars and they do not receive a refund. Also include gas tax, sale tax, and rent and the number soars even higher. Perhaps this lessens the \$55,200 to a great degree.

UCLA's North American Integration and Development Center

Undocumented immigrants contribute at least \$300 billion per year to the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). Certainly takes away from \$55,200.

Researcher Marisol Sanchez

Although conservative groups claim that undocumented immigrants are a social burden, these folk tend to shy away from social services fearing deportation. Did that consideration get looked at for the \$55,200?

Thunderbird, the American Graduate School of International Management

- Arizona gets \$8 billion in economic impact annually from the relationship with Mexico. Profit!
- Mexico gets \$5.5 billion.
- Mexican immigrants paid nearly \$600 million in federal taxes and sales taxes in 2002.
- Mexican immigrants use about \$250 million in social services such as Medicaid and food stamps. Another \$31 million in uncompensated health care. That leaves a profit of \$319 million
- The total buying power of Arizona's Mexican immigrants is estimated at \$4.18 billion.
- The state's Mexican immigrants spend an estimated \$1.5 billion in mortgage payments and rent annually.
- Mexican tourists and visitors spent \$962 million in Arizona in 2001, while state residents spent about \$328 million in Mexico.
- Remittances from the state's Mexican immigrants to their homeland reach \$486 million in 2003, with those transactions generating about \$57 million in fees to Arizona banks and financial institutions.