

# Helping immigrants in Arizona and Texas

## Report of a trip to the United States

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## Introduction

Last year I traveled six weeks through the United States, to visit Catholic Worker groups and related communities. My focus was to meet with groups that do the same as the Jeannette Noël House in Amsterdam: living in a community with refugees. More specifically, I was curious to find out how hospitality is organized per group, how hospitality for each guest comes to an end (sometimes a difficult issue in the Noël House) and whether and how these groups think about broader views on migration, such as the theme of 'open borders'.

And though my trip dates from a year ago, the visions and policies and practices concerning migrants and immigration are still pretty much the same, which makes this report still relevant for today. Hopefully it makes interesting reading for anyone who wants to get an impression of groups and organizations that try to help - mostly - undocumented immigrants in the U.S. border region with Mexico. A significant political development on the federal level might be the recent proposal by a bipartisan group of senators for a bill to reform the immigration system; this may include some sort

of amnesty for the 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S., also an expanded guest-worker program, but as a counterweight even more strict border control measures.

Along the way, I was warmly welcomed by people who mostly did not know me, but who liked the fact that someone from far away showed interest in their activities. To Catholic Worker houses my longtime friendship with the Noël House formed an easy introduction. Other individuals and groups also showed themselves very hospitable and benevolently offered me space and time: there are so many nice people in the world!

## Itinerary

In preparation I searched on the site [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org) in the list of communities for those sheltering Latino migrants and refugees from other parts of the world. By starting in California I would travel to New York in six weeks. California has more than twenty Catholic Worker groups, several of which focus on migrants. The group in Oakland, near San Francisco, provides migrants with temporary shelter and seems to be quite like the Noël House. But making contact was not easy and therefore it was difficult to set a departure date and make flight arrangements. Their website has a good quote from archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, Florida:

"The so-called 'illegals' are so not because they wish to defy the law; but, because the law does not provide them with any channels to regularize their status in our country - which needs their labor: they are not breaking the law , the law is breaking them."

So I started in the city of Tucson in Arizona, where all kinds of organizations are working in the field of 'border issues' or 'boundaries and migrants'. From there to Texas, to El Paso on the border with Mexico. – An unplanned visit to Austin was very valuable. - Then to the Open Door Community in Atlanta, to visit friends who started this Protestant Catholic Worker. Next was St. Louis, in the middle of the country, where the Catholic Worker group gives hospitality to migrants. To the north lies Chicago, where Su Casa houses refugees and migrants since 1990, but time was too short. Friends in Cincinnati showed me their longtime dedication to homeless issues, mixed with protests against the process of gentrification in their innercity neighborhood. At the east coast I stayed again, after 25 years, at Dorothy Day House in Washington, DC, where migrants and activists live together. Finally to New York, to visit the original Catholic Worker houses, where the founder Dorothy Day herself lived most of her life.

## Departure

In the week before departure I was at City Hall in Amsterdam to attend the presentation of the brochure 'Passport of Amsterdam' which lists basic rights of undocumented people ('illegal' people, without a residence permit; irregular migrants, non-status immigrants). Many of them as well as many who want to help them, as volunteers or professionals, don't know what rights they have, so this publication by local and national support-groups for the undocumented was warmly welcomed. The first copy was handed to the mayor, who stated that he would not cooperate with government plans to arrest a certain annual quota of illegal immigrants. Find the brochure on <http://paspoortamsterdam.nl/en/>

During take-off and landing the new migrant detention center at Schiphol Airport was clearly visible. On January 13 last the Catholic Worker Amsterdam organized, in cooperation with Amnesty International and several regional church groups, a 'March for Hospitality' to the newly opened center, protesting the detention of migrants. A good number of 400 people attended and the regional press wrote elaborate articles, making sure that this quite remote center does not go unnoticed.

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## Tucson - Arizona

This city in southern Arizona is located 100 km from the border with Mexico, in a desert area. Its half a million inhabitants are spread over a large area where low-rise housing dominates, also in the center. Many houses are built as bungalows, with lots of space around it, along wide streets - which are perfect for cycling! Parks and gardens are filled with palm trees, succulents and cacti of all kinds. The Santa Cruz River behind the Greyhound bus station is dry for nine months of the year; only wintertime sees heavy showers, the monsoon, causing the flooding of some streets and tunnels. Difficult to imagine in early spring, when the sun shines hot like in Holland in August, and already everyone walks with a bottle of water in hand. This is just spring, in August it will be twenty degrees warmer and then, so they say, you will prefer to remain in the shadows after eight o'clock in the morning.

### **Casa Maria**

With such temperatures Casa Maria, the Catholic Worker house, requires no dining hall. Except on weekends, they prepare more than 500 meals daily, in a house where every morning from half past five the first guests gather and get coffee. On the grounds around the house are picnic tables and benches. The guests, many Latinos, some whites, blacks, Asians and Native Americans, arrive on foot or by bicycle. They come from all over the city, as it is reportedly the only daily meal provision; some come by car, because they live in it or because they don't have enough money for gasoline and for food. Everyone gets coffee, hearty soup with bread and a well stocked lunch bag (with bread, fruit and cookies), while some of the guests get a family bag with vegetables, fruits and canned food. -



Watch the video on [www.casamariatucson.org](http://www.casamariatucson.org).

The house across the street has some rooms for staffmembers, a guest room (for me), a central area where regular free medical consultations are held and a large pantry where the lunch bags are filled. Many volunteers come to help, including groups of pupils of secondary schools in the city, students from the university and remarkably many retirees from the north of the U.S., who stay here for the winter and want to do something social. - Chad, a man in his sixties who lives at Casa Maria since 18 years, makes soup and collects food from shops in the city. The amount of slightly damaged and almost overdue food is enormous. He is often surprised that no matter how many or few volunteers there are, the work always gets done. In the adjacent third house is a large clothing store, where everyone can find something: the supply is exceeding demand. This is also home to Brian Flagg, who is the leader of this community for almost 30 years. At his place people can take a shower and use the phone. - At noon the 'free kitchen' ends, and all the guests are gone, as ordered by the police; relations with the neighbors are okay. Remarkable are the solar panels on the roof of the house with the kitchen. With so much sun here, you would expect that many have such panels on their roofs, but the only ones I see in Tucson are surprisingly on this soup kitchen.

Casa Maria consists of three houses, with over ten staffmembers, some of whom live at the houses, while most live somewhere else. There is a wide circle of occasional volunteers and a large network



of religious and other groups that now and then come to cook. Brian says that in his early years he organized many non-violent protests against the arms race and for housing for the homeless, and that he has often been arrested. Later he realized that community organizing offered more chances for real change. Since then the group focuses more on the interests of the mostly Latino neighborhood residents, including their homeless guests. So a few years ago they brought together several hundreds of people at City Hall to argue for maintaining control over the buslines in Tucson. They founded an

association of people who make extensive use of public transportation, the Bus Riders Union. Their example was a successful group with the same name in Los Angeles, founded by the Labor / Community Strategy Center, see [www.thestrategycenter.org](http://www.thestrategycenter.org) . Highly motivated members of this organization I met in Johannesburg in 2002 at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development; they knew how to present their vision very well at the Global Peoples Forum.

The Bus Riders Union uses the time for public hearing at the meeting of the city council, where the budget is discussed. Several members - not Brian himself - argue against the proposed drastic rise of the prices of bus tickets, because they and many others with little money depend on this transport. A decision is not yet taken that night, and afterwards Brian encourages each to come again next time to speak again. He praises the people who participated, of whom it was clear that they had not dared without his encouragement. – After attending another meeting of a city committee, he talks about possibilities for political campaigning to get more funds allocated to benefit the poor in the city. This is not simple, the councilors are conservative or just a little 'liberal', and likely to be guided by the interests of developers and rich families. Such powerful groups try to break the institutions of the city, because 'the less government the better' - but the poor people are depending on a strong government that can curb such forces. Brian would therefore always ask the question: "What's in it for the poor?"

What is remarkable about this group is that they are very actively campaigning and lobbying to local politics. The food supply is the main thread in 30 years; their second focus once was 'witness' in protest actions, but since a long time it is more on influencing local policy. And sometimes with success: bus prices are not raised in 2012. At the same time there is still room to give testimony: in November Casa Maria refuses a gift from Walmart. At the opening of a new branch in Tucson this supermarket donates an amount to various charities. Brian explains that they refuse the \$ 2,000 - because although Walmart has low prices, they also pay very low wages, make it difficult for unions and for small shopkeepers, so it is 'blood money'. - Dorothy Day once also rejected a gift from the Ford Foundation, because of poor working conditions at the Ford factories. Money is needed and always welcome, but not if it comes from brutal exploitation that wrongs many.

On my last night Chad is telling stories. He is very happy with the help of Ethan, who, because of arrests during Occupy events, has to do community service and therefore rides the truck to pick up food at shops. And Ethan loves



to do this kind of service to the community. He also talks about brother David, a Franciscan and a good friend of the house. Then there is a knock on the door and brother David himself walks in! With some others he brings almost daily containers with chocolate milk to several houses for the homeless. He announces that he will spend Holy Week, the week before Easter, as usual, with friends in Atlanta, Ed and Murphy of the Open Door Community, to participate in the daily vigils for the homeless, as they have been doing for years. Will I join him? What a coincidence: I will also visit Ed and Murphy, though later, after Easter. Brother David Buer in his brown habit is a striking figure, offering hospitality to homeless folks in his Poverello House and for many years active against nuclear weapons at the nuclear testing grounds in Nevada.

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## **BorderLinks and Derechos Humanos**

In the center of Tucson I pay a visit to two organizations, which have their offices opposite.

**BorderLinks** has a modern building, with offices in front and dormitories in the rear; the latter are for groups of students and church members, who come from all over the country to see the border areas with their own eyes. That's what this organization wants: to show American citizens what is going on on both sides of the border, informing them on the spot with the intention that they will tell about it when they get home and so hopefully will influence their environment with a better understanding of the issue, under a well-known motto: 'see, think, act'. See [www.borderlinks.org](http://www.borderlinks.org) They also have a facebook page and a blogspot. Each year about 600 people participate in the trips in the border region, ranging from one day to three weeks. In addition, they usually visit places in Mexico, especially the sister organization HEPAC Nogales, just across the border. They offer internships of several months for students to investigate 'border issues'. Special programs are available for teachers who want to teach about migration; they also organize visits to places in Mexico, such as Chiapas, for in-depth study of specific topics.

BorderLinks emerged from the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s, when many political refugees fled the violence in Central American countries. Since 1988 American groups visit the border areas in so-called 'immersion trips', where they speak with residents, aid workers, politicians, border guards etc. What is striking about the descriptions is the great attention to the economy: the impact of NAFTA, the free trade agreement with Mexico [which drives small farmers out of business by heavily subsidized U.S. agricultural products].

BorderLinks' mission is to bring people together to build bridges of solidarity across borders and to foster intercultural understanding and respect. That sounds a bit general and according to education coordinator Margi this is on purpose. They do not promote a special vision on migration issues and want to be a more or less neutral facilitator. Staffmembers of course have their own ideas, but as an organization they do not present themselves with political opinions, in order to remain acceptable for e.g. those church groups and universities that are hesitant to get themselves involved.

Some do not appreciate this approach. Later that day I sit on the patio of the Roadrunner hostel, where I sleep several nights, talking with Vicky Squire from England. She does research on migration and had been in Tucson the year before, and now comes for an update, on her way to a conference on migration in California. Jimmy, the manager of the hostel, puts it plainly: he does not like it, all those people from Europe and other parts of the U.S. who come here to see how bad Arizona deals with migrants. These people break the law by illegally crossing the border, so if they get caught and put in detention, they are not pitiable, but they took a well-known risk, 'if you break the law'. So they deserve punishment and deportation. And politicians should not always make untenable promises, a president should do 'just the right thing', i.e. use his common sense. Does he see a solution in a

different policy? That he finds difficult to articulate. - He resents the fact that the migration debate has virtually come to a stop, because supporters and opponents around the themes have taken their stands and call the other party stupid without further arguing. He has a good point here: on the internet I have read this complaint several times - that there is hardly any real discussion anymore, positions are taken and hardened. - Jimmy accuses BorderLinks to advocate open borders, even though they don't say it. By criticizing the migration policy, as he understands them, and by taking groups for tours to the border area they promote the only alternative in Jimmy's eyes, that is open borders. For present-day policies he sees no better option. – So while BorderLinks tries not take a clear profile, although Jimmy thinks he looks through it, their neighbors across the street are very clear about their position.

**Coalición de Derechos Humanos** or Human Rights Coalition is a small militant grassroots organization, located in an old whitewashed house that needs maintenance. Their mission is to promote respect for human rights, fight against the militarization of the border area, against discrimination and against abuse of power by government personnel. The slogan on their posters and newsletters is 'Ningún Ser Humano es Ilegal! - No Human Being is Illegal!'

See the website [www.derechoshumanosaz.net](http://www.derechoshumanosaz.net) They want to make people aware of their rights and encourage them to become politically active. In public opinion, they want to raise awareness of the gross violations of human rights of migrants and the militarization of the border. Since the more strict policy in the 90s the bordercrossings in cities are increasingly closed to immigrants, which causes them to take the risky way through the desert. Many do not survive this journey. Since the 90s approximately 6,000 migrants were found dead. The list of the dead, which Derechos Humanos keeps on the website - like United Against Racism does it for Europe - begins in 2000 and has so far 2,466 deaths; approximately half are stated with name and age. Because the U.S. government makes the crossing so difficult, the government is also responsible for the deaths. "The immigration policy is a total failure and should be changed. The deaths are the direct result of this policy." To combat the xenophobic immigration policy, they organize various activities: they give courses on human rights, give legal clinics for migrants whose rights are violated (by employers, landlords, etc.), they learn illegal migrants about their rights against the border police, they offer training for the immigration exams etc.

Keeping the list of the dead implies that they also contact the families of the deceased to inform them. To keep their memory alive, they organize a weekly vigil at a Marian chapel in downtown Tucson, at All Souls Day a pilgrimage around the city and in June a hike of 120 km. from Mexico to Tucson. For this hike see a report by Corinna Rauer from Germany on [www.borderlinks.org/get-involved/news-and-events/migrant-trail](http://www.borderlinks.org/get-involved/news-and-events/migrant-trail) The name of this website shows that these activities are often an alliance of various groups in and around Tucson. They do a lot together, refer to each other. BorderLinks sends their guests across the street to talk with the radical human rights group. Blanca Bay, who manages the office, understands that BorderLinks will not always sign their radical statements: at many universities and colleges there is censorship and a ban on protests when it comes to 'border issues'. She shows me a backroom with shelves full of boxes with small white crosses, with names and dates, ordered by year. These crosses they take to the vigils and the Migrant Trail in June.



While Blanca answers the phone I get to talk with Oto, a student from Brazil, doing 'border studies' at a university in Massachusetts, and now at a several months internship at Derechos Humanos. I am indeed one of the many who come here with the same interest. Oto shows on his laptop all kinds of interesting sites, including images of Altar, a village just across the border in Mexico, where many make a living by helping migrants prepare for the journey through the desert to Arizona. A church group organized a free reception center in the village. He also points to the organization Alec, the American Legislative Exchange Council, a nationwide association of politicians and businessmen, who promote rightwing politics with lots of money and are therefore quite influential. See [www.alecexposed.org](http://www.alecexposed.org) Their own website [www.alec.org](http://www.alec.org) makes clear what they stand for: 'Limited Government, Free Markets, Federalism'. According to Oto this club gets a lot of money from the unscrupulous Koch brothers; on their way of doing business and political lobbying a documentary is made ['Koch Brothers Exposed', which I will see later at the Occupy group in Cincinnati]. The group Alec is the driving force behind legislation in many U.S. states, that makes life more difficult for migrants. Oto describes the relationship between strict anti-immigration laws and the growth of the 'prison industrial complex', which ensures that the U.S. has relatively the highest number of prisoners in the world. By criminalizing illegals the many private prisons fill their cells. The companies that run prisons gladly give financial support to politicians, judges and sheriffs, who during their election campaigns speak against immigrants.

The basis for the activities and public campaigns of Derechos Humanos is formed by the weekly open meetings in a room of a public library. There the agenda with current affairs and planned actions gets discussed with anyone who wants to have a say. Among the more than twenty attendees I meet four law students from the University of Los Angeles, who study 'migration'. Also, four men from Occupy Tucson, including Ethan, who announce that after three encampments were cleared by the police, they are going to open an office near the university.

Isabel García is chairwoman, she reports on a group trip to El Salvador, a pilgrimage along places where martyrs died like Bishop Oscar Romero, the four nuns, the six Jesuits and others. She has a powerful presentation, she describes 'border security' as an attempt by the government to better control its citizens. Arizona was chosen by the federal government as a testing ground, it was already a rightwing state, and many racist white people from the Midwest gladly moved in during the last decade. There are much less vigilantes (against migrants) nowadays, because their leaders got elected into political positions. She also speaks about the censorship on protests against migration policies, particularly in schools. But that is exactly the right place to talk about immigration, about slavery, about the NAFTA free trade agreement. Ethnic studies are important because they encourage empowerment, but precisely because of that they are curtailed. Good interviews and speeches by Isabel García can be found on youtube. Her characterization of Derechos Humanos speaks for itself: "It is elected officials' job to compromise, not ours."

Derechos Humanos also works with the company nextdoor to them: Pan Left Film Productions. [www.panleft.net](http://www.panleft.net) They make documentaries on social issues. See for instance their movie about Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who has become infamous in Arizona and beyond with his ruthless crackdown on migrants. See <http://underarpaio.com/2012/10/06/watch-under-arpaio-on-youtube>

Of course Derechos Humanos also campaigns against the Arizona immigration law that was passed in 2010. This law,



SB1070, authorizes the police to check the papers of anyone who might be illegal, while illegal residence becomes a serious crime. This naturally leads to 'racial profiling' which means discrimination. The objections raised by numerous groups against this are virtually the same as those raised in Holland against the criminalization of illegal residence. It is in fact a general requirement of identification, which was introduced in Holland in 2005 despite many protests. Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles compared this identification requirement even with the regimes of Nazis and Communists. Meanwhile the Arizona law was somewhat mitigated by the intervention of the federal government, but requirement of identification is still part of it, possibly with arrest and deportation as a result. In the new version limited forms of humanitarian assistance to undocumented migrants will no longer be punishable. The law led to a boycott of products from Arizona, and Derechos Humanos still calls for this boycott. Isabel García calls Arizona a testing ground for tougher immigration laws, and it is remarkable that after SB1070 politicians in other states introduced similar bills, taking off the sharpest edges while still trying to make the lives of migrants more difficult.

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**Cesar Chavez march**

The folks from Derechos Humanos also participate in the Cesar Chavez march, held annually in Tucson. Many migrant organizations and progressive groups gather in the field next to a church,



where representatives of migrants, labor and churches hold speeches and where a traditionally dressed group performs folkloric dances and rituals. Then we walk for miles through the city to a park, where music is made and groups present themselves in information booths. It is a diverse mix of organizations, ranging from migrant groups, including the Border Action Network, and a coalition of Asian migrants to 'Veterans for Peace' and 'Jobs with Justice'. One banner says: "¡Somos Parte de la Solucion!" (We are part of the solution!)

Cesar Chavez (1927-1993) was the great union leader who organized the migrant agricultural workers. Many streets are named after him, portraits of him and of Bishop Oscar Romero you'll find everywhere in places that are important to Latinos, and in Catholic Worker houses. Chavez was a friend of Dorothy Day, he visited her in New York; she published in *The Catholic Worker* about his United Farm Workers and in 1973 at age 75 she participated in their strike of grape pickers in California, where she was arrested.

A quote from Chavez: "Once social change begins it can not be reversed. You can not un-educate the person who has learned to read. You can not humiliate the person who feels pride. You can not oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. "

Along the way I talk with Sarah from Tucson who has just started her first year as a teacher of 'literature and art.' She explains to me the meaning of a sign that a man carries, with the words 'Necesitamos M.A.S.' The regional school board of Tucson has abolished 'Mexican American studies' in primary schools (up to 16 years), although – and precisely because - it is so important for cultural integration and maintaining ethnic consciousness among Latino students. All kinds of books have been banned and are not to be used anymore. Teachers must now teach from 'white British' history, in which the culture and history of Hispanics are undervalued. They may not even talk about the visions of these prohibited books and who are not allowed to carry them in school. Pupils are called up to report 'deviant' teachers to the board, after which they may be easily dismissed. Reminiscent

of communist Eastern Europe or China. Teachers of other subjects than history may still use these books; Sarah does not know if she will dare take the risk in her first year and she wonders in what idiotic system she ended up. In a stand in the park students show the books that are now prohibited: history but also novels. Banned books include 'Rethinking Columbus' by Bigelow and Petersen, 'Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement' by Rosales, '500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures' by Martinez, 'Critical Race Theory' by Delgado and Stefancic, and novels by Rudolfo Anaya. - Later I visit the alternative bookstore 'Revolutionary Grounds'. They have a bookcase with books that are banned from school libraries, among them even fairy tales and poems for children. - See also [www.SaveEthnicStudies.org](http://www.SaveEthnicStudies.org)

When the gathering after the march ends in the early afternoon, Ethan invites me to come along to the meeting of Occupy Tucson, in a park downtown. They had their first camp there, which the police evicted with force, just like the two camps they organized after that. Armory Park has a war memorial for 1914-1918 with the inscription 'Lest we forget'. Mary, who is with women's peace group CodePink, is busy with hanging banners on lines between the monument and the trees. The beautifully decorated banners with names and photos are part of the Peace Ribbon Project, they are sent in memory of victims of the war in Iraq: American soldiers, Iraqi civilians, journalists. Until the meeting starts, I assist her. The General Assembly of Occupy Tucson is surprisingly well facilitated by Ethan and a friend; they are excellently skilled in the sign language that Occupy groups use, and so are the participants, most older white women and men. So they go easily through the agenda which they know by heart, without using paper. An important issue is the management of the office, which they will shortly take into use. The group shows a notable optimism: they expect their numbers to rise substantially, if only they act in the right way, so 'they' (the powers that be) will not be able to ignore them anymore. See [www.occupytucson.org](http://www.occupytucson.org)



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**Vicky Kline and No More Deaths**

The british Vicky Squire who I met in the hostel was just like me trying to make an appointment with Vicky Kline, whom she met on her previous visit. I had email contact with Vicky Kline, because of some articles on migration, which she wrote for the National Catholic Reporter, on [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org). The articles said that she was active in the Catholic Worker and now looking for work in the border region. Now she has just returned from a conference in Washington DC and invites us both to sit and talk while having lunch in a diner downtown. Vicky tells us that years ago she lived in the Catholic Worker house in Kansas City, and that after a while elsewhere she came to Tucson and stayed for a while at Casa Mariposa [see below]. Now she lives in the south of the city by herself, while she tries to uphold the values that she pursued in the live-in communities. Living alone makes it more difficult, but by doing it the more it grows to be your own lifestyle instead of it being a more or less matter-of-course pattern in the community. Vicky sometimes feels uncomfortable: for her 'moderate' friends she is too radical and for her radical friends too moderate. She earns her money as a social worker in a hospice. But her main passion is 'border issues' and then Tucson is the place to be. In comparison, for example, El Paso is much quieter, because it is much more difficult to cross the border there. Texas and California have protected their borders with fences and walls and therefore the migration flow shifted to Arizona, especially the desert area south of Tucson. Vicky tells about her recent trips to Mexico City and Washington DC, where she lectured at conferences on 'border patrol abuse', mistreatment of migrants by border police. She has collaborated on a report

on this, recorded from migrants who talk about their experiences in detention. See <http://www.nomoredeaths.org/Abuse-Report-Culture-of-Cruelty/View-category.html> The report makes clear that abuse is a structural phenomenon, that according to international standards it should be termed as torture, and that for lack of control the border police can do this with impunity.

As the name of the website shows, Vicky works for the organization 'No More Deaths - No Más Muertes'. This ecumenical group started in 2004 on the initiative of religious leaders in Tucson, with the intention to considerably decrease the number of deaths among immigrants in the desert on the border. As a volunteer organization they build on the work of groups like the Samaritans and Humane Borders, who have been offering a similar kind of help since resp. 2002 and 2000. They drive daily through the border area in search of migrants who arrive on foot through the desert. In the summer they put up camps in the desert, from where groups of volunteers (including students and church members, from across the U.S.) walk the area to put big bottles of water along frequently used paths, and to offer water, food and medical assistance to migrants whom they meet along the way. In 2005, two employees were arrested because they took three migrants in their car to Tucson to see a doctor. This assistance was regarded as a crime with possible penalties of 15 years in prison and a huge fine. Then the group started the campaign 'Humanitarian aid is never a crime', and in the following year both were acquitted. They also work in several reception centers in places just across the border, for practical assistance to migrants who are deported by the Border Police. Due to the ill-



treatment in detention, many need medical care. These centers also provide the basis for the third project of No More Deaths: interviews with migrant workers about their experiences in detention, which resulted in the above-mentioned report.

Has any vision been developed within the organization on a broader solution to his problem? Vicky says that in an overarching vision you would have to merge many aspects, political, legal and especially the economic imbalance between the U.S. and Mexico and other Latin American countries. In fact they have their hands full with the daily work of

rescue. However, their website provides a page with five 'Faith-Based Principles for Immigration Reform':

1. Recognize that the current Militarized Border Enforcement Strategy is an ill-conceived policy. It leads to thousands of deaths and does not keep migrants from coming. Border control should be humane and focused on protection.
2. Address the status of undocumented persons currently living in the U.S. Offer them a procedure towards legalization and citizenship. This provides workers and their families with stability, which is good for the country as well.
3. Make family unity and reunification the cornerstone of the U.S. immigration system. Shorten the immense waiting periods and allow families to immigrate as a unit.
4. Allow workers and their families to enter the U.S. to live and work in a safe, legal, orderly, and humane manner through an Employment-Focused Immigration program. That should provide protection of rights, such as organizing in trade unions, easy and safe travel between the U.S. and the countries of origin, achievable paths to residency status, and a basic human right of mobility.

5. Recognize that root causes of migration lie in environmental, economic and trade inequities. Current trade and aid strategies from the U.S. are rooted in greed and lack of respect for workers and their families and their environment in Latin America. This forces them to migrate as a quest for survival. Much needed are international conventions that can build just and sustainable relationships.

These principles largely overlap with the Comprehensive Immigration Reform, as advocated by the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops. They also point to poverty as the primary cause of migration, but are more moderate in their proposals and certainly do not speak of 'a basic human right of mobility'.

Vicky Kline praises the cooperation between the many groups in Tucson and on a wider scale. Each group comes from a different background, but all are working for the same goal: to improve the position of migrants, so any meaningful input and contribution is very welcome. At No More Deaths she also works on information courses and filmed materials for prospective migrants, to inform them in advance about the risks of the journey and the problems of living as an undocumented immigrant in the U.S. The aim is to weaken the still powerful myth that everything is better in 'El Norte' and that success is within reach if you just try. We talk about a similar project that started in the Netherlands in 2011, the television-series and website 'Surprising Europe'; see [www.surprisingeurope.com](http://www.surprisingeurope.com) Later that year the series was also broadcasted on Al-Jazeera English. Some criticised this project because it supposedly tried to keep migrants out of Fortress Europe, while others argued that many come fully unprepared for what is waiting them, and at least should be informed beforehand in order to weigh the pros and cons and strengthen themselves for the problems ahead.

Early in the summer of 2012 helpers of No More Deaths noticed that the water bottles they put in the desert sometimes get destroyed. Suspicions towards landowners or vigilantes appear to be unjustified. Hidden cameras show officers of the border police, who take pleasure in pushing the bottles into a ravine. The public television station PBS shows the images in July 2012; see article and images [www.salon.com/2012/07/20/cruelty\\_on\\_the\\_border/](http://www.salon.com/2012/07/20/cruelty_on_the_border/)

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## **Casa Mariposa**

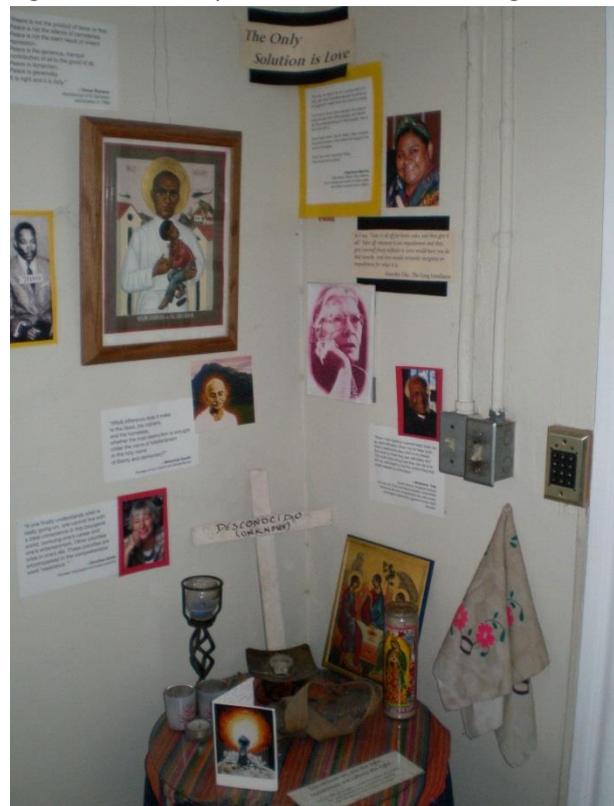
On Wednesday evening Casa Mariposa has a community meal, a meal-time where everyone is welcome. The wide hallway through the middle of the house is decorated with multicolored butterflies of paper on the walls: mariposas, symbol of change in nature, humans and society. This corridor is filled with long tables, where some thirty people sit down, after a ritual in gestures and a Mexican greeting song. Preceding the meal resident John Heid presides the silent sitting for half an hour on the back porch; John is a Quaker and likes others to experience the power of shared silence. After dinner Paul, a neighbor, tells me about his participation in the activities of the house: he goes regularly to the Greyhound bus station to pick up stranded migrants and offer them a few nights in Mariposa. These are migrants who got arrested anywhere in the U.S., not in the border area, for lack of papers, who were detained in the migrant prisons in Florence or Eloy, towns between Tucson and Phoenix, and were released on bail or because they signed to return to their homeland - and invariably they are dropped off by the police at the Greyhound in Tucson. They can sleep at Mariposa, refresh, use the phone, and then usually after one or two nights they travel on wherever they want to go, usually to family or friends in the U.S.

John Heid is in his fifties with long hair, a very gentle man, cheerful and serious, who once dropped out from seminary and through Catholic Worker groups ended up at Jonah House in Baltimore, where priest and peace activist Philip Berrigan taught him to earn a living by painting houses; this is what he still does in Tucson. In the footsteps of Berrigan he also has a tradition of getting himself arrested at nonviolent protests against war and weapons production and other forms of injustice.

Defense contractor Raytheon has a large plant in Tucson, building guided missiles and drones, and predator drones are stored at the air force base near the city. Working for a peaceful society evokes concern for the plight of immigrants. He spends many hours with the Samaritans, an organization that puts water bottles in the desert south of Tucson in places where many migrants from Mexico come along. See [www.tucsonsamaritans.org](http://www.tucsonsamaritans.org) In the Sonoran desert each year nearly two hundred migrants are found dead. Today John spent all day driving in western Arizona along local contacts, in order to identify what are currently the most frequently used routes. These change regularly and it is important to know them if you want to offer water efficiently.

Empty water bottles are lying on the floor in the hallway. All kinds of posters and pictures and texts show that this house is an action center. At the community meal there is also a group of students who are staying at BorderLinks, who earlier today practiced a roleplay under the guidance of a friend of the house. She explains that this 'creative drama' is important for them to empathize with the various actors in the drama at the border. Participants take turns playing the role of migrant (1, 2, etc.), the social workers, the police, and even the dog of the border police, and the debriefing together is important, in preparation for their visit to the border.

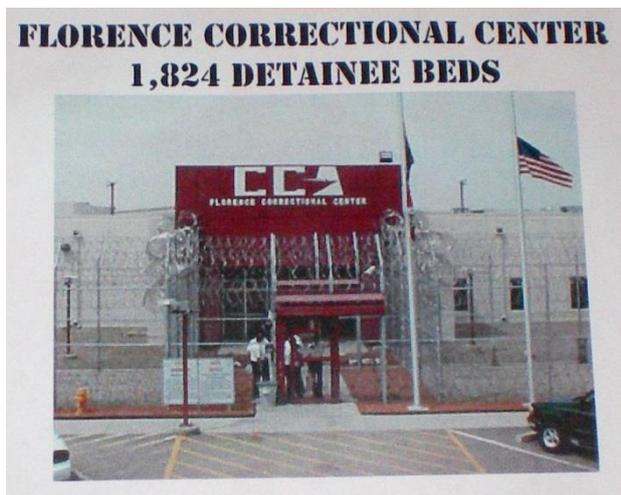
In a corner in the back of the hallway a table has a cross for the unknown dead migrant, a sandal from the desert, an icon and candles, and on the wall are pictures and quotes of inspirational sources: Dorothee Sölle, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Tolstoy, Oscar Romero, Bonhoeffer, Rigoberta Menchu and Bishop Tutu. At the top is a quote from Dorothy Day: "The only solution is love." With the candle comes an invitation: "Sometimes we are the light, sometimes we reflect the light. You are invited to light a candle, for those who suffer, for your enemies, for yourself, for healing, for the light of love to grow stronger."



The core group of the house consists of John, Rachel, Carol and Kate. Carol Bradsen, theologian and writer, and her friend, pastor 'father' Kate Blair are both active in the Episcopal church, while the young Rachel Winch who was from a non-religious background became a member of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC. This remarkable church is sponsoring her work in Tucson. See e.g. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_the\\_Saviour\\_\(Washington,\\_D.C.\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Saviour_(Washington,_D.C.)) As an independent Protestant church they combine spiritual development with social action, assuming all members to be seriously committed in both areas. They organize housing for the homeless, provide free medical care, help find jobs, and want to grow as a church provided that personal relationships remain possible, which caused them several times to split up into smaller communities. When I visited them in 1987 in Washington, I was struck by the warm atmosphere at a wedding of two of their homeless guests. [Some weeks later I visit the Potter's House, the cultural center and bookstore of the church in Washington; the volunteers speak very friendly about Rachel, who represents the church on her 'mission' to the border. ] - So Casa Mariposa brings together different spiritual traditions, including Presbyterian and Catholic, and they also draw inspiration from the long history of Catholic Worker houses and the more recent New Monastic Movement.

Except for occasional guests like me they offer short-term shelter to migrants who come from detention. A woman from Ethiopia lives here for a longer term; she asked for asylum at the border and is recognized as such after two years, and now as she waits for the arrival of her family, she can stay here. Temporary resident is Ella, who is a trainee at BorderLinks. Questions about the termination of a person's residence are no issue here.

Rachel is coordinating the **Restoration Project**, which is committed to migrants in detention. On the website of the house, [www.restorationproject340.wordpress.com](http://www.restorationproject340.wordpress.com) the project is explained: "We work with faith-based groups and people of conscience to build a network of mutual support with those being detained and who have been released. Together, we are restoring our human community. Together we are weaving a sustainable lifeline of hope, solidarity, and tangible support through letters, visits, and by offering hospitality in our homes to men, women, and youth just released from detention." Legal organizations that are working in the detention centers in southern Arizona pass the names of detained migrants, who would like to get a visit. Rachel recruits and trains volunteers to contact them first by letter and then go for regular visits. The Restoration Project is one of the organizers of the monthly vigil against migrant detention at a commercial detention center in the town of Florence, which is notorious for mistreatment of migrants by personnel. The organizers want the immigration service to terminate their contract with the commercial prison company CCA. - The project also includes the weekday visits to the Greyhound bus station to help dropped off migrants.



When I volunteer to the bus station with Hector, who also works at Casa Maria, and who is trying to organize home care workers into a union, we bring bags with bottled water and food, plus a cellphone. The manager of Greyhound expects us and says that all dropped off migrants had a ticket to travel on. Good for them! -

Is the Restoration Project working on alternatives to migrant detention? Rachel has heard of experiments with electronic anklets, but that's more for lobbyists in Washington, it is far beyond the reach of a regional project like this. Reflection on another migration policy

lies outside the sphere of attention. The project is a member of a national organization, see [www.detentionwatchnetwork.org](http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org) Carol hands me an article that they have put on their website (see at 14 September 2011): 'A Decade of Detention: the Post 9/11 Immigrant Dragnet' describes the American policy of detention of migrants in brief; see <http://samarmagazine.org/archive/articles/376>.

John asks me to join him for the **Quaker meeting** on Sunday morning. We cycle through the silent center to the house of the Religious Society of Friends. Outside under the trees the chairs in a circle get slowly filled by a group of about fifty, young and old. For one hour we sit in silence; to focus on our inner light or 'that of God in each of us' at first seems to me not easy but it leads to an experience of joint concentration. After the silence a few speak. A man who more or less acts as chairman tells of his visit to the celebration of thirty years Sanctuary Movement at the Southside Presbyterian Church in the south of Tucson. See [www.southsidepresbyterian.org](http://www.southsidepresbyterian.org) On March 24, 1982 Rev. John Fife declared this church a 'sanctuary', a sacred place that offers asylum to refugees. In a short time 500 local churches across the country followed this example. In the 80s they offered church asylum to refugees from Central America, who fled the terror of their government and civil war. They were not welcome in the U.S., because the American government was supporting precisely their governments and trained their police and soldiers. This is still done in the School of the

Americas (now called WHINSEC) in the state Georgia, which has drawn protests for decades. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary_movement) Since the 90s the motive for immigrants is not so much political as well economic oppression. And the Southside Presbyterian Church continues to support them. Remarkable is how they openly ask on their website for employment opportunities for day laborers, who gather in the parking lot at the church, while it remains unclear whether they are (un)documented. After the Quaker meeting I ask the man who told about it how this works. He says it also involves undocumented migrants, and that call for jobs is actually not legal, but the police will not do anything: sometimes the police raids large companies, but they do not harass this church. In the heyday of the Sanctuary Movement the police also preferred to leave it to the FBI, which did prosecute but later lost their case in a higher court. See [www.southsidepresbyterian.org/southside-worker-center.html](http://www.southsidepresbyterian.org/southside-worker-center.html)

Afterwards I talk with a man who works at the group Humane Borders, who place big water tanks in the desert, in consultation with the authorities. See [www.humaneborders.net](http://www.humaneborders.net) Their strategy differs from groups who put bottles of water, without consultation with the government: there is room for all sorts of initiatives because there is so much work to do. Since he was twelve he often went into the desert to Mexico with Quaker leader and co-founder of the Sanctuary movement Jim Corbett, to translate for him. He introduces me to a man whose wife Miriam Davidson wrote a biography about Corbett, and others join to reminisce about their spiritual leader, who died in 2001 but clearly lives on in this Quaker group.

Prior to the weekly **house meeting** at Casa Mariposa we have morning prayer: silence, prayer, Bible reading and prayer intentions. The reading is from Isaiah 40, in English and in Spanish, on behalf of a woman from Ecuador, who arrived last night. She lives in New York, can not stay with her husband because of domestic violence, has applied for asylum for herself and must plead her case in Tucson. - Around noon she comes back from court, with her lawyer, and she is very happy to tell that she can stay - then they go directly to the airport to go back to New York. Rachel calls this success a great exception and she is full of praise for the lawyer, who seriously worked on the case, which not all pro bono lawyers do.

The house meeting will include a request raised by a friend of the house, Gabriel, a student at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He is Jewish and Chicano (=Mexican) simultaneously and points to the similarities in the separation walls and fences between the U.S. and Mexico and those between Israel and the Palestinian territories. He is active in a group with website <http://tucsonfreegaza.org> He asks Mariposa to jointly raise funds for the Youth Bail Fund for young Palestinians who are detained without trial. But Mariposa already asks donations to pay bail for a detained migrant: Marco has become a friend, since they got to know him through the Restoration Project; he has been in migrant detention for six years now, was several times transferred, always in 'sensory deprivation' either in concrete rooms without daylight [which is not unusual in American prisons, but it is an additional punishment, also applied to persons sentenced to death]. In order to bail him out \$ 10,000 is needed, they are halfway now and also already thinking about his possible future, e.g. in their home; a problem might be that he probably will not be eligible to work and therefore will have no income.

How to spend a large donation? Take language courses to improve on their command of Spanish, or purchase a video camera to record interviews with migrants on their experiences in detention. Rachel says there is no such thing as a 'hotline for complaints about migrant detention' as there is in Holland. You can file complaints with a division of the Department of Homeland Security, which means that you will never get any reply. Yet they do report complaints with this institute, in order to prove later on, through the Freedom of Information Act, that the government has been informed on the situation.

In the coming week there will be a protest against a board member of the University, former Senator DeConcini, because he also is a board member of CCA, the large commercial prison company. CCA manages a.o. the detention centers for migrants in Eloy and Florence. This protest has been organized for some time by the Corazón de Tucson, a group of migrant women whose husbands were detained. Their first target was the big bank Wells Fargo, which invests in companies such as CCA, and which in Phoenix donated office space to the notorious sheriff Arpaio. Meanwhile, migrant organizations formed a coalition, see [www.fuerzaticucson.wordpress.com](http://www.fuerzaticucson.wordpress.com) and Rachel takes part in it on behalf of Casa Mariposa.

An important issue is the search for another house. Their lease will soon expire, after 3 years. Now they pay \$ 1,800 per month for this house with 7 bedrooms. The owner wants to sell, and while it would be worth about 180,000 in this area close to the center it can also be rent out per room – like the Roadrunner hostel (six bunkbeds per room at 20 per night) – which raises the price considerably. The group cannot raise three hundred thousand, so they are looking for a different place.

At the end of the house meeting John tells about his plans to do a protest action on Good Friday at the Federal Court. Every weekday groups of undocumented migrants are on trial there, who have been arrested in the border area; this is called 'Operation Streamline'. John and a friend would like to do a protest in the courtroom itself. The others ask him not to do it in order not to compromise the free access to the public gallery. He says that the guards are very strict. When a student began to cry because she recognized someone from visiting the border town of Nogales, the group was told that she had to stop or that the whole group had to leave. John compares it to the crying on the Via Dolorosa. This production line procedure he calls 'the modern day passion of Jesus.' On that same day Carol and Kate plan to walk the stations of the Cross with church groups, and they also want to make a stop at the court – but without risking arrest, like John and his friend Bob. They match their schedules so as not to get mixed up. John will ask Jack and Felice Cohen-Joppa of the Nuclear Resister to pick him and Bob up from the police station, in case they get arrested.

## **Operation Streamline**

In the afternoon I walk to the Federal Court, next to the Greyhound bus station, to attend a session of Operation Streamline. Currently, this type of group trials are conducted in five towns close to the border. It is a legal procedure, introduced in 2005, to prosecute every illegal border crossing as an offense which deserves a prison sentence. - Previously, the prosecutors were more forgiving at a first arrest for an unlawful stay, but now every undocumented person first gets detained and will be sentenced through these 'streamlined' hearings. This assembly line way of processing people is much criticized: because the procedure is completed within one day, the assigned lawyers who assist many clients simultaneously, have no time to properly prepare their cases. The chance to ask for asylum, for suspension of deportation or the chance to ask for a visa can not be discussed. The Department of Homeland Security has stated that this procedure is intended as 'prevention through deterrence'. Critics say it is rather 'death by deterrence', because it does not really discourages migrants to come and the strategy is not effective, but it does cause migrants to take more risky routes, leading to more deaths. The number of deaths was 52 per 100,000 apprehended illegal migrants in 2005, and has gone up to 118 in 2010. A consequence is that the circular migration has decreased tremendously. For decades Mexican seasonal workers came to the U.S. to bring in the harvest and then went back. Since border control got more strict with harsher penalties on illegal residence going back is not attractive anymore, causing many to stay undocumented in the U.S. – approx. 5 to 6 million, half of the total number of undocumented in the country. Another consequence is the growth in numbers of people in detention, which especially benefits the commercial prison industry, while the check on humanitarian treatment in these detention centers remains far below standard.

The public gallery consists of six benches on the left side in the back of the courtroom. On the right men are sitting, eight per bench, each with a chain around his waist, to which the handcuffs are linked. Their ankles are chained with a foot chain between them, so that they can walk but not run. A row of six women is similarly chained. In total there are 65 people. While waiting for the judge a lawyer explains to me that these migrants were removed from their cells at Florence as early as 1 am and prepared for the trip to Tucson, very early so they are tired. Many do look tired; some are wearing very worn clothes. All have been arrested in the past week for illegal entry. The lawyer can do no more for them than explain the procedure in the morning hours and help them to fill out the 'guilty declaration' forms. Officially they have the right to a regular trial, however they practically do not stand a chance, but instead run the risk of heavier charges and possibly years of imprisonment, so the lawyer advises to accept the procedure.

The female judge explains the procedure and calls them forward one row after another, to stand at eight microphones. Their lawyers are standing behind them, and they get wireless headphones that allow them to hear the translation in Spanish. The judge asks everyone the same set of questions. - Do you understand the charges against you and what the maximum penalty is? Do you understand you have the right to a trial? Are you going to give up that right and plead guilty? Of what country are you a citizen? (most say Mexico, some Guatemala or Honduras) On the date of [xx] of this year, did you enter into southern Arizona from Mexico? (The dates vary from 23 March to 1 April, that was yesterday.) Did you come through a port of entry? (Answer: No) For illegal entry do you plead guilty or not guilty? (most say 'culpable', some 'guilty')



The first two groups had not been in the U.S. before and get 'time served' and the next day they will be deported to their country of origin. The following groups are given prison sentences ranging between 30 and 180 days. This also goes very quickly, like on the assembly line, the judge asks the questions and sentences immediately, which clearly had been prepared, she gives no explanation as to why one gets so many days. The lawyer explains that

prison sentences depend on previous arrests in the U.S. and are heavier if someone has been found illegal more often before.

I sit in the public gallery with six others, 'to observe Streamline'. An elderly couple is sitting up front. When a group of eight is sentenced they are led out of the courtroom through a door just in front of us. When they pass our benches the couple make a friendly gesture by pressing their hands together, the namaste-greeting, and they smile: many notice this and answer their smile. A knowing glance, it cannot be more, but important as a sign of solidarity, a recognition of shared humanity. Suddenly I realize what it means to be a 'witness', to be a witness of a dehumanizing process and yet be able to make a real human contact. It is confrontational, making angry and touching at the same time. It is bizarre to see these people seriously chained as if they were dangerous criminals. They come to this country to drudge for low wages, they stand here chained like in former days the slaves on the market – and unlike those they are even refused any economic value as 'cheap labor'.

When there are only four left, three men and a woman, the judge leaves the court room, and most lawyers too. The four are ordered to take their place at a microphone and have to wait a long time; the guards of the border police look bored. Finally, a male judge comes and finishes the procedure. Outside the courtroom the couple tell that they live in the northern state of Washington and spend the winter here. They wanted to help the Samaritans to bring gallons of water in the desert, but scrambling through canyons proved physically too heavy. Now they come every Monday



and Friday to the court, to give the migrants moral support through eye contact and a smile and respectful gesture. – How special to spend your winter this way! Just as special as the octogenarians Donna and her husband, who come from Minneapolis in the north to stay in Tucson for the winter and help out at the soupkitchen at Casa Maria and have been doing so for thirty years.

It is time to **say goodbye to Casa Mariposa**. During the evening meal - the picture shows John left, Rachel right - there is

Carolina, who has just been released after two years in the migrant detention center in Eloy. Now she can try to contact her relatives. It strikes me how truly friendly and attentive Rachel talks to her, she is fully present for Carolina. Rachel speaks excellent Spanish, shows a warm attitude to the guest, is quiet and very interested. In a 12 minutes interview in 2010, when she worked for BorderLinks guiding groups to the border, she explains what the border is about. See <http://vimeo.com/11855604> Here she articulates an important insight about the relationship between migration and economic policy: “The wall at the border was not built in 2001, but already in 1994 when the NAFTA free trade agreement was signed. By exports of subsidized corn to Mexico many peasants there lost their source of income, and saw no other option than to go to the U.S., where they are then exploited as laborers for the lowest wages. Any discussion about immigration reform that does not address NAFTA is missing the mark.”

On Good Friday - while I am in Austin, Texas - Carol and Kate walk with a group the stations of the Cross, beginning at the Federal Court, where they attend a Streamline session. Then via the Greyhound to the Marian chapel to burn candles for the migrants, and ending in their Episcopal church. See <http://restorationproject340.wordpress.com/2012/04/16/good-friday-at-operation-streamline> That same day John and roman-catholic priest Bob Carney keep a vigil at the entrance to the courthouse, holding a sign that says ‘Streamline is the contemporary Passion of Jesus’. In their statement they point to the poverty which migrants flee in hope of a decent life and reunification with family members. While they want to show solidarity with them and call for an end to Streamline and the deportations, they recognize their kinship with those who implement Streamline, ‘in our name, but without our approval’. When they are instructed to leave, father Bob steps aside, while John gets arrested.

The search for another home has continued and by early December the new house is dedicated. Here, the ‘memorial for the lives lost in the desert’ on the table in the corner is again installed and the group wants to re-connect with its commitment to peace and justice. Very special people! Should I visit Tucson again, then certainly Casa Mariposa.

It is obvious that a week is too short to explore 'border-issues' in Tucson. Some point out the street where you can take the bus for a one hour drive to the border city of Nogales, from where you can easily walk into its sistercity Nogales, Mexico. There I could e.g. visit the Kino Initiative, active in both cities, organized by Jesuits. It provides first assistance to deported migrants, organizes tours in the region and invites researchers and journalists to study the issues of migration, in order to raise awareness on a national level. See [www.kinoborderinitiative.org/programs](http://www.kinoborderinitiative.org/programs) - With No More Deaths and the Samaritans I can go into the desert to put water bottles along migrant trails. And the university has several departments that deal with migration. But time is too short, and my focus is elsewhere: live-in communities that offer hospitality to migrants.

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## El Paso - Texas

Seen from the bus the scenery outside Tucson is hilly, with barren mountains in the background, it has lowland with tussocks of dry grass, sandy plains, small bushes, cacti and small palm trees far apart. Water trenches are dry. It would not be difficult to walk here, but you are clearly visible and must bring your own water, while around noon the shadows are very short - and it's only the beginning of April. In New Mexico road signs warn of potential dust storms in the next 10 miles: 'Zero visibility possible. Take extreme caution.' Then come greener fields full of flowers and vineyards. We pass farms with hundreds of black and white cows on dark soil, with green meadows in the distance. Free sunshine in abundance, but no solar panels.

The border city of El Paso is with 650,000 inhabitants comparable to Amsterdam. Ciudad Juarez is right across the Rio Grande and has twice as many people. The cities fill up the valley where the river flows. If you take a bike ride along the northwestern slope on the Scenic Drive, you get a panoramic view of the urban area across the valley, with the mountain slopes where Juarez is expanding.

In El Paso I stay at **Annunciation House**. This house in the center of the city offers shelter to migrants and raises awareness among the American public by organizing trips in the border area. See [www.annunciationhouse.org](http://www.annunciationhouse.org) In 1978 a community was started by young Catholics who wanted to



live with the poor, in order to 'help where there is no helper'. Since then they have offered hospitality to political refugees and thousands of other undocumented migrants who cross the border from Mexico. The group chose a simple lifestyle, in imitation of Jesus' solidarity with the poor. Income comes entirely from donations. Meanwhile they offered shelter to 90,000 guests, coming from 40 countries.

The large dilapidated building, which reportedly was built a century ago as a medical clinic, is home to fifty migrants and seven volunteers who run the house. From the original live-in

community there is one left, Ruben Garcia, who is now the director and lives elsewhere in the city. He can often be found in the office, located in a house in the next street. Further downtown is the second shelter, Casa Vides, for longstaying women with children who have applied for asylum and for 'social security widows' from Mexico, who must live in the U.S. two months per year in order to continue to receive payment.

The volunteers in the main house are mostly Americans, in their twenties, who spend some time living and working here. One of them is a German woman, who previously worked in Mexico and now broadens her experience at the intersection of North and South, the First and the Third world. Those who stay for a year receive \$ 500, - as 'travel money'. Not everyone stays that long; within a year usually the whole group has changed. Some will stay a few years. It is also clear that they are not policymakers, they come in a setting where, based on years of experience, a set of rules has developed, and they try to apply those as best as possible, with lots of empathy for the individual guests. Is there some mechanism that promotes team-building? On weekdays they come together from 8.15 am until 9 am in the volunteers' living room for a reflection, which they prepare in turn. So we watch 'Walls of Shame' (a video in two parts on youtube, part of a series on disputed border fences) on migrants, border patrol and organizations that assist migrants. In this video migration expert Judith Gans points to the paradox of migration policy: at the same time there are signs 'Keep Out' and 'Help Wanted'. While there is a strong demand for unskilled labor in the U.S., it

is almost impossible for job seekers from Mexico to enter legally. And those who are already illegally in the U.S., would have to return to Mexico to apply for a residence permit, which almost certainly will not be granted.

The volunteers say that most of their guests are asylum seekers, who present themselves at the border crossing at the bridges over the Rio Grande. Most come from Mexico, and their chances of asylum is 1.7% - thus virtually nil. Many report that they are fleeing the brutal violence of drug gangs, but that does not count in the U.S. as a ground for asylum. They want to be admitted to the procedure anyway, because then they can apply for a work permit and can start sending money to their families. Even though the procedure leads to rejection, it may take three years and then they will face the choice to go back or to stay in the country illegally. The house also receives guests from other Latin American countries, but also from African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana, and from Korea, China, Vietnam. They fly to Mexico and report at the border bridges in El Paso. Those who come single are mostly put in detention by the immigration authorities, but families usually not. By the way, there are no asylum reception centers here, the government provides no shelter or sustenance, so asylum seekers are primarily dependent on private organizations. They arrive at Annunciation House through reference of an relief organization, sometimes through the border police, they come directly to the door.

The house offers accommodation in dormitories with bunk beds, men and women sleep separately. The guests cook according to a schedule for the whole house and all eat together in one big room. The volunteers help them to find legal assistance, medical care and education for the children. A volunteer says that they are allowed to give information only, they can not make calls to agencies to mediate for their guests. If they would do that, they would pretend to be social workers and that is not permitted without the necessary qualifications: she finds it quite frustrating. Sometimes she would like to advise to skip the waiting period of the virtually hopeless asylum procedure and start to live and work 'undocumented' rightaway, and just wait and see how it works out. But everyone wants to try the legal way first, hoping to 'win the lottery'. When the forms have been filled out, with the invaluable assistance of an attorney, the guests are encouraged to leave. Most stay a few weeks or months, and then go on to family or friends, to make way for others. Those who are now the longest in the house have been living there for a year. At Casa Vides the longest staying family has been waiting for asylum for two years. Sometimes a guest is not allowed to stay any longer: if he turns out to be a coyote (smuggler of migrants) or a drug dealer.



Miguel speaks a little English, enough to say that he would like to visit Amsterdam to look around in coffee shops and the Red Light District – that much he knows. He has just made a walk with his father, who is Mexican but also an American citizen and can easily cross the border. Dad is 76, he worked all his life in the gold and silver mines of Chihuahua and lives with the family in Juarez. Miguel had a job in an office in Juarez, where he handled forms for an export firm, but had reason to flee and ask for asylum in the U.S. He says something about drug violence, but then my Spanish and his English are too poor to expand on it.

Besides offering hospitality Annunciation House tries to make people more familiar with the problems of borders and migration. Since twenty years the Border Awareness Experience is a program of traveling through the border regions in both countries, an 'immersion experience' in

which students and groups of church members participate from across the country. The core activity of BorderLinks in Tucson seems to be a copy of it. From email contact beforehand I knew this was only for groups, not for individuals, and that no group trip was planned in the days of my visit.

Each year, by the end of April, the house organizes activities named 'Voice of the Voiceless', with the intention to generate attention for migration issues. These consist of a forum with migrants and well-known speakers, presentation of a Voice of the Voiceless Award to someone, and calls - via website and newsletter - in their own network to highlight the theme and to write to politicians with concrete suggestions for a better policy.

In order to further their own expertise the office has a small library. To acquire more recent publications a list of desired books was compiled and donors were asked to sponsor a particular book. That is a great success: dozens of current books are present. I get ample opportunity to browse through them, to write down titles and make photocopies of some chapters. Unlike in Tucson here I see many studies about drug trafficking, violence, life in drug gangs, and the coyotes who smuggle both migrants and drugs across the border.

This drug violence in Juarez leads to thousands of deaths each year, while El Paso is one of the safest cities in the U.S. The gangs are fighting for market share in the drug trade across the border and go to any lengths to safeguard their export interests. The annual commemoration of the deaths at the border, part of the Voice of the Voiceless activities, relates mainly to the victims of drug-related violence, including many immigrants who against their will get involved in this fight. - The volunteers say that they also participate in the Mass on November 2, All Souls, which the bishops of the two border cities celebrate since 1998. On both sides of the border fence stands an altar, together they form one table of the Eucharist, symbolizing the unity of the body of Christ. The volunteers also remember how father Roy Bourgeois and a colleague of SOA Watch were arrested in February at a demonstration at the fence, after they had gone over the fence and come back: an illegal border crossing. In 2008 father Roy got the Voice of the Voiceless Award, for his unwavering commitment to migrants. He is founder of the School of the Americas Watch, which since 1990 demands the closure of this training center in the state of Georgia, where police and military personnel from Latin America learn how effectively terrorize their population and keep them down in poverty – which gives the citizens reasons to flee to the U.S., that keeps the border closed. See [www.soawatch.org](http://www.soawatch.org) Fr. Roy Bourgeois was recently dismissed from his order of Maryknoll priests because of his endorsement of women priests.

That particular fence is too far from the center. Walking towards the border I do not get to the Rio Grande: between the Cesar Chavez highway and the riverbank is a fenced off rail yard. Juarez is still far away. According to the volunteers, the river is dry here, because it is dammed upstream for irrigation of agricultural land. Both bridges are completely covered, the entrances are well protected with plenty of fences with razor wire. I am advised against visiting the other side, not so much



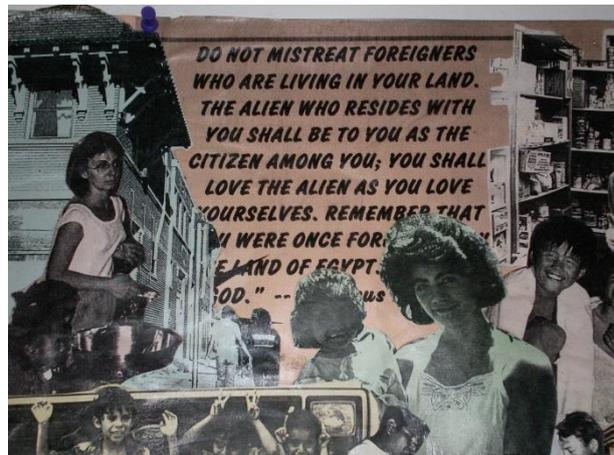
because of the risk of violence, but rather because I would have to wait at least four hours upon return: as a non-American I would have to join the line of Mexicans and others who get thoroughly checked.

I do not have that much time here, so I'd rather call at **Sin Fronteras**, very close to the bridges. This 'center for farm workers in the border region' is a foundation which since 1983 provides assistance to migrants, seasonal workers and poor neighborhood residents. To

this end, they provide food and clothing, safe shelter, English lessons, finding employment, integration courses, recreation and cultural gatherings. A small medical clinic and a cafeteria are open daily. The center is also an important place for agricultural employers around El Paso, to pick up day laborers. They come as early as 2 am to pick up job seekers, to bring them in buses to plantations in the region, so they can start working by 4 or 5 am, and bring them back in the evening. A volunteer, who is also a member of the executive board, shows me the gardens which they lay out on the grounds and tells about the much larger organic vegetable gardens which they cultivate on a piece of land outside the city. Thus they want to show an alternative to the large-scale agriculture, which pays workers a meager wage in poor working conditions. The 20,000 farm workers who work north of El Paso earn on average nearly \$ 6,000 per year and so remain below the poverty line. The introduction of the free trade treaty NAFTA in 1994 has led to a deterioration of working conditions. And although there is a benefit for disability by illness or accident, farm workers are excluded from it.

Annunciation House does not consider itself to be part of the Catholic Worker movement, but the sources of inspiration and the method are similar. In the house is a wall that is decorated with photos of various people who have lived here. In between are quotes from Leviticus 19 and Matthew 25 about welcoming and loving the stranger. Of course there is a portrait of Bishop Romero. On a large mural in the dining room of Casa Vides are his words: "When I die, I will rise again in my people." The

vision of the house, on the website, says that living with undocumented migrants makes it impossible to see them as 'aliens' or 'illegals', as the border police and immigration service call them. The guests are not statistics from distant countries, but they represent Jesus in the disturbing guise of the 'least among us'. "The undocumented are the heart and soul of the work of Annunciation House." Here also the words of Elie Wiesel are quoted: "There is no such thing as an illegal human being!" That is why volunteers will say: "Bienvenidos! Mi casa es su casa." The undocumented migrants are fleeing the violence of globalization that is visible in grinding poverty, unemployment, low wages and hunger. They flee the institutionalized violence of those governments that suppress those who champion literacy campaigns, better jobs and better health care. They come without suitcases, only with the clothes they are wearing. Not knowing how unwelcome they are, how many doors are closed for them. Nevertheless, they are still the lucky ones: the poorest can not escape the slums. The undocumented are the new chosen people of God, they call us to understanding and compassion, to open our hearts and homes, and to realize that we are all one in the body of Christ. They ask us to be the innkeepers who say 'yes' to Jose and Maria when they knock on our door. They make us look critically at the gap between rich and poor, making us reject the collective social sin of structural injustice. And though they come from countries where Christ is still daily crucified, these homeless migrants bring us the good news of the resurrection. They show us that the last words are not death and despair, but hope and life.



Based on religious motives and economic insights this vision makes very clear that people fleeing poverty deserve to be warmly welcomed. 'Poverty is injustice' - that is a notion that is virtually absent in the asylum and migration debate in Holland. While Fortress Europe and Africa are separated by a wide sea, here in El Paso one can step from the first world immediately into the third world. For inhabitants of the rich world the poverty at the neighbors' side is directly visible and can not be ignored.

After a few days I board the bus in the evening. After a half hour drive, at quite a distance from the city we stop at a station of the border police. Dogs search for drugs in luggage, passports are checked. Most passengers are Latino, some black, I am the only white man. A young black man needs a stick to walk. A disabled Latino man is helped into the bus by a woman; she also assists him when he staggers to the toilet in the back of the bus. How sad that they can not afford a more easier way of transport! The bus is considered transportation for the poor, and I realize how enormously privileged I am. Early in the morning I'm sitting in the bus station in San Antonio waiting for the trip to Austin. On television CNN reports the top five countries where people are happiest: Canada, Netherlands, Norway, Finland and Denmark: that sounds plausible. The Catholic Worker group in San Antonio is not in my travel plan: they do not focus specifically on migrants. They seem to be organized in a similar way as Annunciation House: led by a coordinator the reception and soup kitchen are run by resident volunteers, who mainly come through Brethren Volunteer Service for a social year. See [www.sa-catholicworker.org](http://www.sa-catholicworker.org)

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**Austin - Texas**



The capital of Texas has over 800,000 inhabitants and the center shows the typical skyline full of skyscrapers. Carol Bradsen of Casa Mariposa in Tucson advised me strongly to visit Casa Marianella, a shelter for migrants like Annunciation House and also regarding the vision kindred to the Catholic Worker movement. It is located in a simple neighborhood south of the city center, where all houses are built in bungalow style.

**Casa Marianella** consists of three houses, where immigrants get temporary shelter. There is room for 35 men and women who sleep in bunk

beds which fill several rooms. One of the houses serves as a meeting place and classroom for English and 'basic rights', while there are also treatment rooms of an acupuncturist and a kinesiologist. A fourth house, Posada Esperanza, is located elsewhere in the area and provides a safe place for 5 Latina women and their children who are fleeing domestic violence. See [www.casamarianella.org](http://www.casamarianella.org) It started in 1986 and is named after a woman who was murdered in 1983 in El Salvador because she stood up for human rights.

Director Jennifer Long invites me for the afternoon walk of the stations of the Cross. It is Good Friday and a group of Latin Americans has gathered to walk a route through the neighborhood. Two men dressed as Roman soldiers are doing their best to harass the young man who plays Jesus, while women encourage them, evoking the story of Easter. At the stations we pause, read a Bible passage with reflection and prayer, alternately in Spanish and English, and sing songs accompanied by guitars and tambourines. Jennifer says that not all guests participate because many are at work - fortunately. The volunteers who run the house are absent: most are not religious, not even religiously interested – same as in Annunciation House. The houses maintain good contacts: Austin is located far from the border, so new volunteers go visit in El Paso, to talk with all kinds of people and

agencies involved in issues at and across the border. They also visit other towns in the border area, e.g. to listen to workers who try to organize unions in the 'maquiladores', the American factories in the free trade zones along the Mexican border. A volunteer says: "After three days of talking with people in the border area, you get a clear view of the undeniable interdependence between our life in the U.S., our economic policies and their impact on the income and workers' rights there."

Unlike Annunciation House the volunteers who form the staff, do not live in the house. They are not a live-in community that provides hospitality, rather Casa Marianella is a shelter-house, whose staff lives elsewhere and are present by rotation. When I help Moira in the kitchen, she says she is studying psychology at the University of Austin, and keeps coming also after her practical training. Volunteers who commit themselves to run the house receive a fee that pays to rent a room somewhere in the city and for transportation; it remains below minimum wage. Moira does not like the idea of living 'on-site', as the staff of Annunciation House. She and her colleagues are each a mentor for several 'clients'; they discuss them in a weekly team meeting.

One house is reserved for migrants who do not come from Latin America: asylum seekers from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nepal, and other countries. An Eritrean man says he flew to Mexico from Saudi Arabia, with a smooth transfer at the airport, they thought his visa good enough. In Mexico, he traveled to the border and asked for asylum in the U.S. People like him, who stand a reasonable chance of getting asylum according to legal experts, are taken in and can stay here for about three months. They must monthly report to their 'deportation officer'. That seems a strange name, but when someone submits an application for asylum, the eviction process is started, because a residence permit is possible but not a matter of course. Their contactperson with the immigration authorities during the procedure is also the deportation officer.



The guests from Latin American countries are staying only a few weeks up to a month at Marianella. They have virtually no chance of asylum, and are encouraged to search as fast as possible for shelter and a job elsewhere in the city. Most come just for that, are very 'pro-active' and announce their departure on their own initiative, with many thanks for the initial reception. A few people are afraid to jump and take very little action. Jennifer tells about a woman who has been there six months; she helps her to find a room, and will not easily put someone out on the street. Previously Latino guests stayed more than a few weeks, but since the house gets a significant part of its budget from the Austin municipality budget for the homeless, they need to show a large turnover; this is now about 200 people per year. After departure, some are successful in finding jobs, with or without a residence permit, and come back to report a room to rent or offer jobs. Other people also call offering jobs and rooms. Every week a new list of these is put up in the hall, and also undocumented residents from the neighborhood come in to see what is on offer.

Sometimes the police brings a group of immigrants, whom they have liberated from the hands of coyotes who are often drug dealers at the same time. These have taken migrants across the border and then hold them captive and force them to make phone calls to relatives to ask for ransom. During these calls, the kidnapped migrants are beaten to lend weight to the demands. Such migrants usually disappear from Marianella the next day, afraid of the police and of the folks at the house, not knowing who they can trust.

Jennifer invites me to stay at her house which is in another neighborhood. In the late seventies she lived with the Catholic Worker in Los Angeles. She met Walter Long, who as an attorney worked for political refugees from Latin America. Since their marriage and move to Austin she strives to provide practical help to people fleeing violence and poverty. She maintains good contact with Catholic Workers. A young woman is staying at her house: Rosie, daughter of Ellen Grady and Peter DeMott (who died in 2009), peace activists in Ithaca, New York. Rosie shows me youtube videos about the work of peace activist Kathy Kelly, of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, also showing her mother Ellen and Art Laffin, who I will meet later on at the Catholic Worker in Washington, DC. Jennifer's husband Walter is as a Quaker highly motivated to fight social injustice. After a long time as asylum lawyer he now defends people who have been sentenced to death. He is studying psychology now in order to better understand the traumas of relatives of death-row inmates. Waiting for execution may take many years, while children grow up with a father in prison, families are themselves regarded as criminal by their environment. With others, he began a project at the University of Austin, which is a growing collection of interviews with relatives, lawyers, judges and prison personnel a.o. The videos and texts are available on their website [www.texasafterviolence.org](http://www.texasafterviolence.org) By presenting these stories from many people involved from different angles they want to present a more human context to the often simplistic debates on violence and death.

According to Jennifer the 'comprehensive immigration reform' such as the Roman Catholic bishops propagate, is a term that suggests more than it implies, for these proposals are not 'comprehensive' and certainly not radical. Rightwing people reason: illegal immigrants are breaking the law, so they must be deported. If you want to immigrate, you must submit a request and just stand in line. "But there IS no line!" The requirements are so tough that most migrants stand no chance to ever get a residence permit. Some advocate a kind of 'general amnesty' for the 11 million undocumented who are already in the U.S. President Reagan of all people did that in the eighties, but today 'amnesty' is a taboo word in political circles. Against this attitude liberals must come up with a good story, and that's tricky. Jennifer makes a comparison with Occupy. In Austin the tent camp was cleared by the police after six months, because authorities argued that too many homeless people had joined. But while liberals did not strongly reply to the Tea Party or came up with too complex stories, Occupy presented the concept of the 1 vs. 99%, and those 99% 'that's you!' This has opened many people's eyes and set them in motion. Such a crisp and powerful concept is also needed for the issue of immigration.

Walter and Jennifer bring me to the Greyhound, and I say goodbye to a very special couple: both heavily involved in the endangered lives of their guests and clients, and that for many years, with great dedication.

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## **Other groups**

It would be obvious to visit **Casa Juan Diego**, the Catholic Worker house in Houston. In 1980 Mark and Louise Zwick started a shelter for political refugees from Central American countries, today they run ten houses 'to serve immigrants and refugees, uprooted by the realities of the global economy'. See [www.cjd.org](http://www.cjd.org) The story of their work they published in 2010 in 'Mercy Without Borders. The Catholic Worker and immigration'. My emails went unanswered and from others I understood that the Zwicks barely make time for visitors, and it is not possible in their organization to stay a few days or to come along and help as a volunteer. So I travel on, via New Orleans to Atlanta. In the bus and on the street are much less Latinos but many more people who are black or white.

The focus of this trip is on communities that offer hospitality to migrants. Therefore I had previously contacted Catholic Worker groups in St. Louis, Chicago, Akron and Washington, DC. Since my stay in

Atlanta took much longer than planned, there was no time to visit Chicago and Akron. For the groups in the other two cities hospitality to migrants is part of their activities, but it is not central.

To wind up this travelogue about hospitality and migrants, here are some notes on other groups.

The **Open Door Community** in Atlanta in the southern state of Georgia is all about hospitality for the homeless, mostly black and white. Themes are poverty, racism and the death penalty. See [www.opendoorcommunity.org](http://www.opendoorcommunity.org) Before serving the homeless guests in the soupkitchen the whole community gathers for reflection, this time reading the famous letter of Martin Luther King, which he wrote in April 1963 from jail in Birmingham, Alabama. He responds to an open letter of white church leaders who think that 'Negroes' should not stress the urgency of the fight against racial segregation. It is noted that these church leaders follow the same line of thought as those who today tell migrants that they should neatly wait in line for their turn, instead of breaking the law by entering illegally. But such a line does not exist! Or like those who say that immigrants have to wait until the third world becomes more developed - while the western world supports that development on the one hand, but at the same time works against it on a much larger scale. I tell briefly about the actions of 'Refugees on the Street', a self-organization of undocumented folks who stage demonstrations and tent encampments to protest their exclusion from society, along with the powerful speech of Dr. Helen Hintjens, who argued that undocumented migrants experience today that racial segregation and apartheid are still alive in Holland and Europe. In the U.S. there are slightly similar public appearances by undocumented people, who during organized rallies dare to speak out in public about their problematic situation.

The homeless guests who are taken in in the house can stay as long as they want, unless they show unsustainable behavior. The core group does not use evaluation terms: "I would not want that for myself," says Ed Loring, "as long as we stick it out together, we live together." Thus he applies the Golden Rule, which Jesus gave in his Sermon on the Mount: 'Treat others the way you want to be treated' (Matthew 7:12). For the guests, the house is a halting-place, to put their lives back in order and to make new plans. Some leave on their own accord, others stay on and become fully participating members of the community.

While at the farm of the Open Door, a two hours drive from Atlanta, friends come to visit from the live-in community **Jubilee**. This group lives in a rural area elsewhere in Georgia, where they offer hospitality to resettled refugees from various countries. These are selected in refugee camps by the American branch of the International Rescue Committee, and are housed in diverse places in the U.S. Later on I learn that in Tucson there is a similar reception center, where many Eritreans are staying. Jubilee provides shelter and English courses and integration courses in theory and practice. After two months the guests move to Atlanta, where church organizations provide them with a furnished apartment, and assistance in finding a job and getting the kids to school. See [www.jubilee-partners.org](http://www.jubilee-partners.org) Please note that this is another group than those who ask for asylum and/or are undocumented. These people are invited by the U.S. government as recognized refugees. Holland also allows annually several hundreds of refugees to immigrate this way.

In a poor neighborhood in St. Louis where half of the houses are abandoned, Karen House counts three decades of offering hospitality to women with children. A few minutes walk from there is **Carl Kabat House**, which is the center of a small Catholic Worker 'village' of beautifully fixed up old houses. This slowly growing community, founded by Carolyn and Tery Griffeth, shelters - apart from long-time peace activist father Carl Kabat himself - several mostly Latino immigrants. Some of them will likely get a residence permit, others probably not. These guests can stay as long as they want, because 'hospitality and sharing what we have are at the heart of our vision of a better world for all people.' Their magazine has a special issue on 'Immigration: Loving our neighbors as ourselves'. See [www.karenhousecw.org/Immigration2009.htm](http://www.karenhousecw.org/Immigration2009.htm) The current permanent residents are less busy with immigration than before: in addition to their part-time jobs, they are swallowed up by other causes,



including renovation of dilapidated houses, help out in Karen House, urban farming, Food not Bombs, Occupy etc. They try to live in a sustainable way, in simplicity and by sharing with those who have nothing. With much love and humor they make visible that another world is possible. The issue on immigration is definitely worth reading, as well as other issues of their magazine.

**Dorothy Day House** in Washington, DC also counts thirty years of hospitality to homeless women and children, especially migrants, from Latin America and other parts of the world. Some are undocumented, others have a temporary residence permit, of others the core group does not know what their status is, and they do not care. The five women and their children can stay as long as they want - after all, say core group members, we want to treat them as we would like to be treated if we were in their shoes. So they also apply the Golden Rule. Even with a residence permit cheap

housing in the capital is terribly hard to find. In the past eighteen months, none of the guests left; a woman is living there with her son for seven years now. The presence of migrants in the house keeps the core group alert to the political and economic consequences of American policy. In response, they continuously organize nonviolent vigils and other actions, at the White House and the Pentagon. All core group members have been repeatedly arrested, some served prison sentences for Plowshares actions. Often even the chapel is filled with mattresses for activists who come from all over the country to protest war and to witness for peace. See [www.dccatholicworker.wordpress.com](http://www.dccatholicworker.wordpress.com) During my visit, a group of anti-drone activists from Syracuse, NY stays at the house and together we attend the weekend conference on drones, organized by CodePink, where Medea Benjamin presents her book 'Drone Warfare. Killing by Remote Control' and where many good speakers argue against killer drones and advocate a strict regulation on the use of drones. See <http://droneswatch.org>

Former core group member Paul Magno now lives with his daughter and some occasional guests one block from Dorothy Day House and he works for the organization **Witness for Peace**. See [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org) This group started in 1983 by sending American citizens delegations to Nicaragua, while the Reagan administration supported the violence of the contras. Thus they built an organization that collects facts on the spot, publishes them in the U.S. and has created a strong grassroots movement in the U.S. Their aim is to promote peace, justice and sustainable economies across America, through changes in the policies of the U.S. and in the conduct of large companies that up till now cause poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean. They expressly point at the free trade agreements such as NAFTA and DR-CAFTA as the cause for migration, because small farmers lose their income and wages in the maquiladoras often remain below subsistence. Therefore they promote alternative legislation on trade agreements, with elaborate details and a set of principles for 'immigration reform'. These include a.o.:

= Policies that prioritize human rights, labor rights, and access to healthcare, regardless of immigration status.

- = Reforms that stand by principles of non-violence and do not force military service on immigrant youth as a means of obtaining citizenship. [In this they deviate from many groups who support the DREAM Act.]
- = The provision of clear and non-discriminatory pathways to citizenship, residency, and transnational mobility.
- = The termination of policies that promote collaboration between police and immigration authorities, which erodes trust between immigrants and security forces.
- = The repeal of laws such as SB1070 in Arizona, which encourages racial profiling [=discrimination].
- = The prevention of for-profit detention corporations from drafting anti-immigrant legislation and/or lobbying on behalf of punitive legislation.
- = The provision of temporary homes and social services for immigrants facing deportation in the U.S. as well as support programs for returned immigrants in their country of origin.

See the 'Statement on Immigration Policy' on the website. It is a very difficult process to bring about change. The law on alternative trade agreements, the TRADE act, has been discussed in House and Senate, but not (yet) adopted.

In New York I visit **St. Joseph House and Maryhouse**, just off the Bowery in Lower Manhattan. Helping out at the soupkitchen and doing the dishes gives plenty of time to talk with members of the community. I am right in time to join the May 1 anniversary celebration and party: the Catholic Worker started 79 years ago. So good to meet them, some familiar, some getting a face to their names, many new, a very dedicated and inspiring group. Their guests, the homeless men and women who they take in, can stay as long as they want, and many live there for the rest of their lives.

May 1 is also the day for a variety of activities organized by Occupy Wall Street - including attention to anti-immigrant policies. At rallies there are calls for an end to detention and deportation. 'Equal rights for all workers. Stop the raids and deportations.' See also <http://occupywallst.org> and [www.may1.info](http://www.may1.info)

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## Conclusion

Did I get answers to my questions? Partly, and the context was different from what I imagined. The various groups show different models of hospitality, which mainly depend on the needs, the prospects and the options of their guests. So in some houses the guests stay only for days or weeks, because they can and want to move on, while in other houses guests may stay indefinitely.

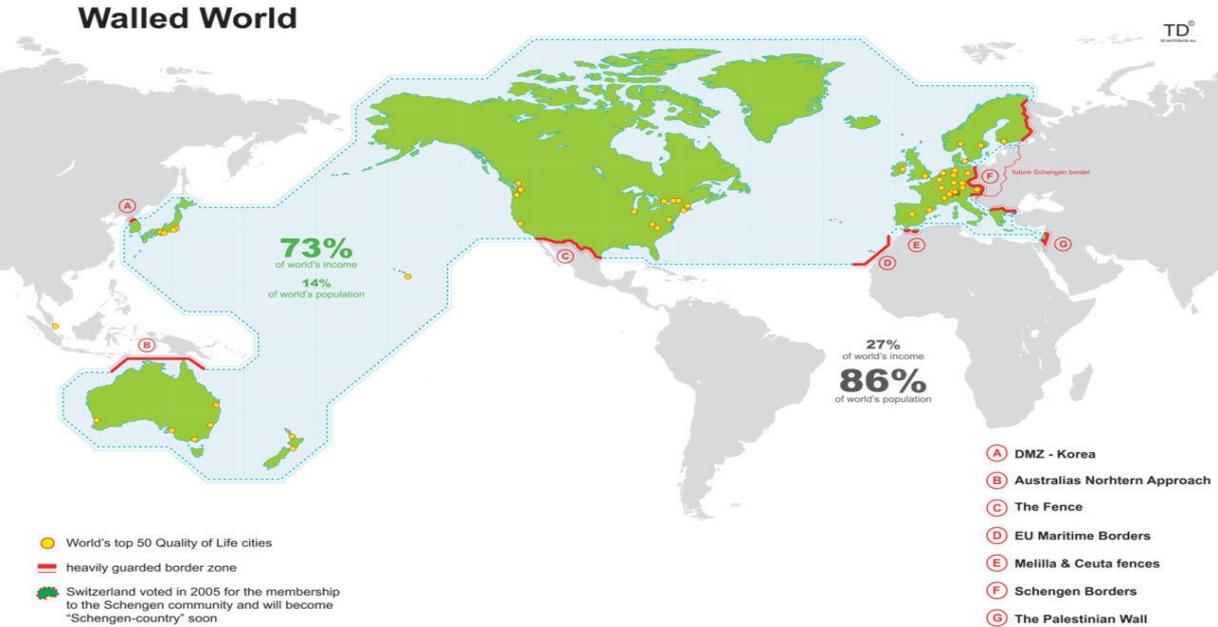
The Noël House in Amsterdam offers primarily hospitality to refused asylum seekers, who yet stand a chance to get their case reviewed or renewed. After refusal they are evicted from the government-run asylum reception centers



and have to fend for themselves, but are not allowed to work, which is meant as a discouragement. While awaiting their procedure they are not 'illegal' but with very few rights and they depend on friends, on charity and individuals or groups like the Noël House. Hospitality at the Noël House comes to an end when the final decision is made in court: those who get a residence permit will move to an apartment, get on welfare while trying to find a job, but those who are definitively refused are told to leave the country (which they usually do not) and therefore are told to leave the house. Able young men are put out on the street and will find friends to stay with and irregular day labor. It is a lot harder to tell women with child(ren) to leave and fend for themselves, especially when they have become very agreeable members of the big 'family'. They may get an extension for a few months, but then they have to leave just the same. Many times this issue raised painful deliberations and difficult discussions. Though it is not necessary to practice hospitality in conformity with court decisions – it is not against the law to shelter undocumented migrants – it has been the longtime routine of the house, thus filling a void in government services. Now how do we reconcile our policy with our simultaneous refusal to acknowledge the government's labelling of human beings as 'legal' or 'illegal'? If we welcome strangers into our house, seeing them as Jesus (Matthew 25:35-40), then why evict 'Jesus' when the state calls him or her 'illegal'? What does our proclamation imply that we are more loyal to the Kingdom of God than to the kingdom of the Netherlands? - This is why I asked groups in the U.S. how they deal with limits to hospitality. Some point to the Golden Rule: 'Treat others the way you want to be treated'. What if these words of Jesus would become the guideline for hospitality at the Noël House?

I have visited some really special groups and met very inspiring people. They live the works of mercy in their daily lives, and by doing so they offer a counterweight to American politics, to an economy and culture that glorifies the law of the strongest. They show that another world is possible, with compassion and with the Sermon on the Mount as a guide.

The border region is easily accessible for Americans, so for those who want to keep their eyes open the horrors and injustices are clearly visible. For residents of Fortress Europe the Mediterranean sea is more difficult to survey, so the tragedy there remains more remote and it is less easy to organize practical help. The 'No Border' action camps and the cruise by 'Boats4People' are attempts to reduce that distance. Water in the desert is much needed to save lives, while at the same time a very



different kind of politics is needed, with more humane laws. A German who visited Tucson some years ago said that in Europe we are dealing with a desert full of sections of the law that are aimed at keeping migrants from poor countries at a distance. Bringing water into this desert is a continuous struggle, with little success and many setbacks. - In Europe it is also hard to get asylum for people who flee violence, while for those who flee poverty in the hope of a better life, it is practically impossible to get a right of residence because the legislation based on the Geneva Convention does not acknowledge poverty as a ground for asylum. In the U.S., groups that provide assistance to migrants developed a keen eye for the economic and political mechanisms that keep poor people poor and make them flee to search for a better life elsewhere. These groups realize that their own government and industry - despite the rhetoric to the contrary – maintain and expand those mechanisms such as the NAFTA free trade agreement. They identify poverty as structural injustice and therefore link their practical assistance to migrants simultaneously to political pleas to treat migrants the way you want to be treated.

What about the effects of our economic and political policy in the regions where many migrants come from who stand no chance as asylum seekers? Would the words of Rachel Winch not apply equally to our context, in the sense that any discussion on reform of immigration policy that ignores the neo-liberal trade policy of the European Union misses the mark? Irene Khan, who was secretary general for Amnesty International, has identified poverty as a violation of human rights ('The Unheard Truth. Poverty and Human Rights', 2009). If governments and multinationals fail in their duties, she finds it not surprising that people migrate elsewhere to search for solutions. Thomas Pogge offers in 'World Poverty and Human Rights' (2008) a philosophical framework for reasoning about poverty as injustice. The Transnational Institute, based in Amsterdam, is doing critical research on free trade agreements as designed by the European Union; see [www.tni.org](http://www.tni.org) It is worth mentioning the project 'Africa in Motion' organized by migrant organizations; see <http://africainmotion.com> This project is supported by Oikos, which also promotes Tax Justice, see [www.taxjustice.nl](http://www.taxjustice.nl)

While many have no chance to legal residence under the existing asylum laws, new arrangements are conceivable which would allow them to live and work here. Earlier suggestions provide temporary guest worker contracts. In 'Principles of a Free Society' philosopher Nathanael Smith describes an original proposal for freedom of movement in the U.S., with practical implementation. See also his website [http://freethinker.typepad.com/the\\_free\\_thinker/freedom\\_of\\_migration](http://freethinker.typepad.com/the_free_thinker/freedom_of_migration) Would it be possible to translate his idea into the European context?

Commitment to new chances for those who are now excluded requires a lot of creativity, energy and tough endurance, while keeping the vision in mind that one day we can say de facto and de jure: 'No one is illegal.'

Frans Zoer - Amsterdam - April 2013 – [frans.zoer@hotmail.com](mailto:frans.zoer@hotmail.com)

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For further reading on migration in America, here are some suggestions:

David Bacon - Illegal people. How globalization creates migration and criminalizes immigrants, 2008

Aviva Chomsky - "They take our jobs!" And 20 other myths about immigration, 2007

D. Kerwin and J.M. Gerschutz, eds. - And you welcomed me. Migration and Catholic social teaching, 2009

Philippe Legrain - Immigrants. Your country needs them, 2007

M.F. Marquardt a.o. - Living "illegal". The human face of unauthorized immigration, 2011

Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell - Our God is undocumented. Biblical faith and immigrant justice, 2012

Immanuel Ness - Guest workers and resistance to U.S. corporate despotism, 2011

Jason L. Riley - Let them in. The case for open borders: six arguments against immigration and why they are wrong, 2008

M. Soerens and J. Hwang - Welcoming the stranger. Justice, compassion & truth in the immigration debate, 2009

T.G. Sterling - Illegal. Life and death in Arizona's immigration war zone, 2010

M.W. Varsanyi, ed. - Taking local control. Immigration policy activism in U.S. cities and states, 2010

Mark and Louise Zwick - Mercy without borders. The Catholic Worker and immigration, 2010

Nathanael Smith - Principles of a free society, 2010

The American situation is set in a broader context in:

Jeffrey Kaye - Moving millions. How coyote capitalism fuels global immigration, 2010

A general introduction is:

I. Goldin, G. Cameron, M. Balarajan - Exceptional people. How migration shaped our world and will define our future, 2011 - The last chapter deals with ideas about free migration / open borders.

Others who in their final chapter argue for open borders are:

J. Guskin and D.L. Wilson - The politics of immigration. Questions and answers, 2007 - and also:

T.J. Dunn - Blockading the border and human rights, 2009

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