

CROSSING BORDERS **

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Crossing Borders/Encontrando a Dios
Cruzando Fronteras/Encountering God

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Honored Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is a high privilege for me to be able to present myself before you to talk about an important topic such as migration, inasmuch as it is a problem that has affected both México and the United States. Nevertheless, I can affirm that many people who have crossed borders have found Christ.

I want to begin my presentation by basing it on the Word of God, since the National Presbyterian Church of México – being Reformed – considers the Bible as God’s Word, inerrant in all aspects, as stated by Juan Donoso Cortés before the Court of Cádiz: “Sirs, a prodigious book it is, in that as humanity began to read some thirty-three centuries ago, even though it were to read every day and every hour, it would not yet finish reading...”

TEXT: “*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation*” (Ephesians 2:14). Those words of the man of Tarsus of Cilicia might serve as a reality toward which we can aspire as nations when those walls that have been raised at the border with México are removed so as not to violate U.S. territory nor the human rights of the Mexicans. Did this not exist in the past?

Mexican migration toward the U.S. goes back to the end of the 19th century, when part of Mexican territory became a part of the U.S. At that time, there were no obstacles to Mexicans who were in New Mexico to remain there so that they might build the railroad lines in the south of the U.S. We must not forget that toward the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, Mexicans came to constitute 70% of the railroad workers in the U.S. It was calculated that by 1908, some 16,000 men had crossed into the U.S. to build the railroads; many remained to build the secondary rail routes in Montana, Utah, Colorado and Washington.

At that time, there was no persecution, nor murder, nor imprisonment ... much less any wall that prevented the passage of Mexicans. Even so, that is where the trials began for the Mexicans, as they gave themselves to clearing land, sowing, watering and harvesting. Although it was poorly-paid labor, it was better than staying on our own land.

It is worth remembering that Mexican labor was the solution and salvation to supplement the U.S. labor force when workers marched off to the First World War. From this, the U.S. government established, in 1917, a program to admit Mexican labor. Unfortunately, this program

concluded in 1921, despite its having provided so much help by way of Mexican labor for the American people. The reasons are obvious, and as is always the case, there were opponents, who “don’t eat nor let others eat,” in that they argued that those jobs occupied by the Mexicans could well be taken by Americans. As a result, thousands of Mexicans were repatriated.

Even so, history does not forget that later on – at the time of the Second World War – Mexican labor was again made use of, with the so-called “Bracero” program (1942-64). With this program, Mexicans could once again enter the U.S. to supplement the soldiers who had gone off to war. Would it not be possible, in our time, to have other agreements that would prevent the deaths of Mexicans in the desert or in the Rio Bravo? (Note: On the U.S. side of the border, this river is known as the Rio Grande.)

On one hand, we see the present need for labor which, after all, is cheaper for the Americans. On the other hand, despite all the obstacles, it has not been possible to stop the flow of immigrants to the U.S., even with increased patrolling. Neither heavy regulations, put on employers to prevent their employment of Mexicans, nor walls that “reach the sky,” have prevented the continued passage of Mexicans into the U.S. It is now calculated that there are over four million illegal Mexicans in the U.S., and every year the number of Latin Americans, the majority of which are Mexicans, increases by two hundred thousand. Even the Clinton Administration, in 1993, did not prevent Mexicans from seeing the U.S. as an opportunity for a better economy. What that administration did succeed in doing, however, was to compel our compatriots, who were ready to risk jail or even death, to abandon the urban access points in San Diego, El Paso and Laredo, and travel through the Arizona desert or cross the Rio Bravo in remote areas. Such remote areas are now mute witnesses to the many compatriots who have died; many more took the risk of traveling with “coyotes” who then abandoned them to their luck.

Do we say that this cannot be changed? Surely it can be. It is necessary for our current leaders – both in México and the United States, Presidents Felipe Calderón and Barack Obama – to see the current need for labor in the U.S. and the economic need of Mexicans, and to create a program of mutual help between the two nations.

Here we consider a thought, from a Mexican point of view, that might analyze the reasons that Mexicans seek to enter the United States:

1. The offer of work in the U.S. appears most attractive to Mexicans. Even though poorly-paid, the work is beneficial to them, whether as a dishwasher, waiter, carpenter or field worker. Work that many Americans will not take for \$6 or \$8 an hour becomes, for Mexicans, the source of the second-largest income to México.

2. I recognize that there still is much poverty in México, with 80% of the population being poor or very poor. Those who live in the countryside, who don’t take the risk of migrating to the U.S., are allowing their fields to be sown with marijuana and other plants that create addictions among our youth, especially among the indigenous people.

3. A third factor, which causes me much pain, leads Mexicans to look favorably on the North. We see many “brains” that leave to settle in the U.S. since their gifts are not valued in México; even our best researchers are poorly paid.

4. A fourth reason that we might mention is that many of our youth, simply for having learned another language, take the risk of seeking better study opportunities. México, disgracefully, suffers from an educational system that is still “Third World,” in that study plans and programs leave much to be desired. As an example, in the “open” high school (Note: Similar to GED in U.S.), there are textbooks that have not been updated for many decades. The students who complete a course of study at the National Autonomous University of México (UNAM), in particular, wait for two or three years before they can obtain their degree. (This situation does appear to be improving, however.)

Finally, for Mexicans it is still a dream to cross the Rio Bravo, and as a Mexican I want to propose that we need a migration law that will:

- 1) Provide a legal channel through which Mexican migrants might enter the U.S. to carry out work with salaries that are dignified and humane, and also
- 2) Prove useful for U.S. citizens so that persons who can be of use to the U.S. might enter safely and in an orderly fashion, as was proposed by Fox and Bush in 2001.

A legal channel for migrant labor such as this would increase the security of the U.S. as a nation, as it would provide a temporary, renewable work visa, adjusted in conformity with the behavior of each Mexican who enters the U.S. By having a legal channel for immigrants, the need for so many government workers would be reduced, thus providing a generous economic savings and making these persons available for other needs, such as further research, methods to attack terrorism, and help for other nations. Such activities would help the U.S. maintain its status as the first nation of the world.

I conclude by affirming that the coercive force that has been used by the U.S. at the border has contributed more to the smuggling of undocumented persons and to thousands of deaths than it has curbed the flow of migrants.

By creating a legal channel for the migratory system, the economic development of both México and the United States would be promoted, and the political relations between the nations would be improved. But above all, it would fulfill God’s Word: to “[break] down the middle wall of separation” and show love for the neighbor.

** The statement was presented in Spanish. Translation, notes and initial editing by David Thomas, PC(USA) Liaison to the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico.