

**JUST Notes**  
**SPECIAL ISSUE ON**  
**Migrant Deaths on the Border**  
**July, 2009**

We promise to stand with people who are poor by seeking out and addressing critical needs, particularly in those places where our presence could make a difference and by working with others to alleviate conditions of poverty and oppression.

*- Promise Chapter 2006  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange*

**EARTH CHARTER – PRINCIPLE I. RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE**

3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
  - a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.
  - b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

**NOTE:**

**If you have no time to read the entire JUST Notes, click on the following link to watch a short trailer on “The 800 Mile Wall”** a documentary focusing on how ineffective and deadly U.S. border policy has become. The ever-rising migrant death toll is now commonplace and goes unnoticed by media and government officials. <http://www.gatekeeperfound.org/films.html>

*The Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange will have a special screening of the film,  
“The 800 Mile Wall”, on Friday, September 25, 2009, at 6:30 p.m.*

Five men stumbled out of the mountain pass so sunstruck they didn't know their names, couldn't remember where they'd come from, had forgotten how long they'd been lost. One of them wandered back up a peak. One of them was barefoot. They were burned nearly black, their lips huge and cracking, what paltry drool still available to them spuming their mouths in a salty foam as they walked. Their eyes were cloudy with dust, almost too dry to blink a tear. Their hair was hard and stiffened by old sweat, standing in crowns from their scalps, old sweat because their bodies were no longer sweating. They were drunk from having their brains baked in the pan, they were seeing God and evils, and they were dizzy from drinking their own urine, the poisons clogging their systems. They were beyond rational thought. Visions of home fluttered through their minds. Soft green bushes, waterfalls, children, music. Butterflies the size of your hand. They were walking now for water, not salvation. Just a drink. They whispered it to each other as they staggered into parched pools of their own shadows...just one drink, brothers. Water. Cold water!

*-- Adapted from The Devil's Highway: A True Story by Luis Alberto Urrea*

**FACTS**

- **Funnel Effect** - In the mid-1990s, the U.S. government implemented a “**prevention through deterrence**” approach to immigration control that has resulted in the militarization of the border and a quintupling of border-enforcement expenditures. However, the new border barriers, fortified checkpoints, high-tech forms of surveillance, and thousands of additional Border Patrol agents stationed along the southwest border have not decreased the number of unauthorized migrants crossing into the United States. Rather, the new strategy has closed off major urban points of unauthorized migration in Texas and California and funneled hundreds of thousands of unauthorized migrants through southern Arizona's remote and notoriously inhospitable deserts and mountains.
- The **Binational Migration Institute (BMI)** designed a study to specifically measure the “funnel effect”. This study found that there has been an exponential increase in the number of **unauthorized border-crosser (UBC)** recovered bodies handled by the **Pima County Medical Examiner's Office (PCMEO)** from 1990 to 2005.

*--Adapted from the report: A Humanitarian Crisis at the Border:  
New Estimates of Deaths Among Unauthorized Immigrants published by the Immigration Policy Center*

- On October 26, 2006 President George W. Bush signed **The Secure Fence Act** into law. The legislation allowed the construction of more than 700 miles of new border walls between the United States and Mexico. Upon signing the bill president Bush said, "This bill will help protect the American people. This bill will make our borders more secure. It is an important step toward immigration reform." And more recently, Congress approved the new 700 miles of fencing to be completed by 2010.
- These walls are not a step toward immigration reform nor have they made the borders more secure. What has happened as a result of the initial walls and increased militarization, is the human rights crisis we see today. Nearly five thousand migrant bodies have been recovered in the deserts, mountains, canals and roads of the United States. Several thousand more migrants remain missing. Organized crime at the border has skyrocketed. It now costs over two thousand dollars to hire a "coyote" or "pollero." Some estimates put human smuggling as more lucrative than drug smuggling. There has been no change in the rate of migration to the United States except the cost of transport and the cost of human life. The United States accepts no responsibility for its border policies being cause to the carnage. It blames Mexico and its southern neighbors for the rise in crime and death.
- For the calendar year of 2009 reports indicate it will be a record year for migrant death as almost 100 bodies have already been recovered along the border as of the end of May, 2009.  
*–John Carlos Frey, Gatekeeper Productions*
- For years, deaths of people trying to cross the border usually occurred at night on highways near urban areas, killed by cars. But now, because urban entries in places like San Diego and El Paso have been nearly sealed by fences, technology and agents, [undocumented] immigrants die from the sun, baking on the prickled floor of the Sonoran Desert, where ground temperatures reach 130 degrees before the first day of summer. They die freezing, higher up in the cold rocks of the Baboquivari Mountains on moonless nights. They die from bandits who prey on them, in cars that break down on them, and from hearts that give out on them at a young age. – *N.Y. Times, May 23, 2004*
- The **Government Accountability Office (GAO)**'s (2006) seemingly authoritative declaration that "Border-Crossing Deaths Have Doubled Since 1995" carelessly implies that the total number of migrant deaths in the U.S. is a known figure when this is not the case. As the GAO (2006:27) itself states, "the total number of bodies that have not been found is ultimately unknown." All existing references to "migrant deaths" refer only to recovered bodies, not to the presently unknown quantity of all migrant deaths.  
*--Adapted from the report: A Humanitarian Crisis at the Border: New Estimates of Deaths among Unauthorized Immigrants published by the Immigration Policy Center*
- **The distance** - The crossing here, and then over [the] fence, is followed by a walk of two or three days, up to 50 miles on ancient trails through a desert wilderness, to reach the nearest road, on the Tohono O'odham Nation Indian Reservation, a wedge of desert the size of Connecticut that is overrun with [undocumented] immigrants, or on adjacent federal park or wildlife land. Most people start off with no more than two gallons of water, weighing almost 17 pounds, in plastic jugs. With daytime temperatures over 100 degrees in the desert, a person [needs] a gallon of water just to survive walking five miles.  
*– Adapted from the N.Y. Times, May 23, 2004*
- The price increases for migrants from countries other than Mexico. Border crossers from South and Central America are "kind of like gem stones," Patrol Agent Mike Scioli said. Smugglers charge these immigrants more because they don't attempt to cross the border as often as Mexican citizens and they have to travel farther distances."  
*–Adapted from Border Beat*
- **Drownings** – The All American Canal, located east of San Diego in the southern desert of the Imperial Valley, has long been a death trap for migrants trying to gain entry into the United States. The canal has claimed nearly 700 lives, the vast majority of which have been migrants from Mexico. For almost 70 years the governing body of the canal has been unwilling to add adequate safety features such as ladders and ropes. The deaths have gone unnoticed and many of the unclaimed bodies end up in a desert pauper's grave next to a dumpsite. Increased border security will force migrant traffic to cross the canal and the death toll is expected to skyrocket.  
*– Adapted from John Carlos Frey, Gatekeeper Productions*

- It was the middle of the night when U.S. Border Patrol surveillance camera operators spotted Cesar Coriche Flores' group heading north toward the All-American Canal. When agents arrived on the scene, they picked up five people on land and found two more still in the water. They learned one member of the group was missing. Despite a search, agents came up empty. It wasn't until more than 48 hours later, on June 8, 2009 that Coriche Flores' body was discovered in the Briar Main Canal east of here by an Imperial Irrigation District employee. At 18 years old, he was the youngest person to drown trying to cross into Imperial County illegally this year, but in most respects his death was unexceptional.  
— Adapted by the Water Education Foundation - Aquaforia
- **Children** - Because of heightened border security, many parents who have entered the U.S. illegally to find work to take care of their families cannot return home to see their children and face long-term separation. Children, as young as one year old, are now being smuggled over the border so families can be reunited. While the smugglers promise the parents to keep the children safe, some endanger the health and emotional well-being of the children. Some children are hidden in the trunks of cars, others endure harsh conditions and mistreatment and abuse.  
—Adopted from Education for Justice
- Each year hundreds of unaccompanied children under the age of eighteen attempt to enter the United States without documentation. These children come seeking to be reunited with parents or to find work to help support families in Mexico, Central America, or China. Many of these children reach the Mexican-American border exhausted and sometimes traumatized by their journey. They are arrested by Border Patrol and detained in BCIS facilities in San Diego awaiting removal proceedings in Immigration Court.  
—Adapted from Casa Cornelia Law Center
- Ignacio Cervantes Pantoja, an 11 year old boy, has tried 3 times to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. The fifth-grader has a plan. He'll leave his family's home and take the dirt road across the street, through the park, and keep going until he reaches the edge of the steel-gate fencing that separates the United States from Mexico. He'll cross the border and find his great-uncle, Alfonso, who lives in Los Angeles. He'll get a good job and occasionally return home for visits and bring home presents. "I'll buy my dad a car," he said. "I'll have a good job, and we'll eat well." -- Adapted from the Arizona Republic, May 23, 2004
- **Women** - It is known that women are increasingly choosing to cross the U.S.-Mexico border despite the many risks involved to them and their children. In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security reported that women constituted 55 percent of immigrants to the United States.
- Women crossing the U.S.-Mexico border have to worry about more than the harsh physical demands of crossing a vast desert. With the increase in women attempting to cross, there [has been] an increase in women's physical and sexual assaults, deaths and murder. It is believed that 1 in 3 women crossing the border is physically and sexually assaulted. It is harder to know the number of women murdered, as this is not a category investigated or counted by the U.S. Border Patrol.  
-- Adapted from Stop Border Deaths Now! A project of the Border Working Group
- Katharine Donato, an associate professor of sociology at Rice University in Houston who studies Mexican migration to the United States, estimates that as many as 35 percent to 45 percent of those crossing the border illegally today are women. She said that twenty years ago, fewer than 20 percent of the people crossing illegally were women. The proportion of women coming to the U.S. who are not married and working full time has gone up substantially.  
— Adapted from the New York Times, January 10, 2006
- **Humanitarian Aid** - While the U.S. Congress continues to debate immigration policy reform, community-based humanitarian groups aid migrants in need in southern Arizona by providing food, water, first-aid supplies, and medical assistance. Such groups also hold memorial services for the dead and help locate relatives.  
--Adapted from the report: A Humanitarian Crisis at the Border: New Estimates of Deaths among Unauthorized Immigrants published by the Immigration Policy Center
- By collaborating with the U.S. Border Patrol and the Mexican Consulate, and tracking stories in the news media, Humane Borders has developed detailed map of the region that mark the GPS location of every migrant discovered to have died. Almost all are along footpaths that stretch north across wilderness of death traps. The information offers a strategy for water stations aimed at curbing the

fatalities. On some federal lands, water stations are placed a day's walk apart. More deaths occur in the areas where water stations are not permitted.  
– Adapted from *Humane Borders*

- The Tohono O'odham Nation, the second largest indigenous reservation in the US. The Nation's leadership refuses to allow water stations to be maintained on its lands to reduce the numbers of migrant deaths from dehydration for fear that it might lose federal funds which are directed from the federal government to the Nation for national security purposes. Of the many laws that have been passed that are often applicable only to migrants, there is rarely any judicial review or judicial relief.  
–Adapted from Rev. Robin Hoover, Ph.D., Pastor of First Christian Church, Tucson, Arizona
- **Warning Posters** - Migrant Warning Posters: Don't Do It! It's Hard! There's Not Enough Water! These posters are distributed widely in churches, shelters, shops and other locations on the south side of the U.S.-Mexican border. They warn migrants in stark terms about the dangers they face trying to cross into the United States illegally, on foot through the desert, despite what human smugglers tell them. The estimated walking times from entry points are highlighted, as are the sites of migrant deaths and the location of water stations.  
– Adapted from *Humane Borders*
- **Public Campaigns** - The Mexican consulate has launched a public campaign to discourage people from crossing during the hottest season of the year and ultimately prevent immigrants from surrendering their lives to this merciless desert. Five - 30 second videos have been compiled by the Mexican Consulate of Tucson to warn would-be border crossers of the dangers they may face.  
– Adapted from *Border Beat*
- In an effort to honor every life that has been lost on our borders, Coalición de Derechos Humanos records the number of bodies that are recovered on the border. With the cooperation of Arizona county officials, as well as the Consular offices of México, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Brazil, and the Binational Migration Institute, they attempt to find names to the [deceased migrants] and bear witness to the deaths of those unknown, of whom there are hundreds buried in [their] communities.
- As they attempt to comfort the families who mourn, they also promise to seek justice, peace, and an end to the walls that separate and divide the communities. They honor the spirits of those who have died with the commitment to peace and dignity on the borders.  
–Adapted from *Coalition de Derechos Humanos*

## PRAYER

### Prayer to Jesus, the Immigrant

Jesus, as an infant you fled to Egypt with your mother Mary and Joseph.  
You were a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and sustenance.  
Help us to welcome those like you who cross our borders today.  
Give us hearts of compassion, humane response,  
and laws that respect the dignity of all immigrants.  
Amen.

–Adapted from *Education for Justice*

**TAKE ACTION:** <http://www.boxerfeinsteinbetrayal.org/>

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Borderlinks <http://www.borderlinks.org/>
- Border Angels <http://www.borderangels.org/photography.html>
- Casa Cornelia Law Center [http://www.casacornelia.org/programs\\_det-child.html](http://www.casacornelia.org/programs_det-child.html)
- Coalición de Derechos Humanos  
[http://www.derechoshumanosaz.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=34](http://www.derechoshumanosaz.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=34)
- Gatekeeper Foundation <http://www.gatekeeperfound.org/films.html>
- Humane Borders <http://www.humaneborders.org/>
- Map that shows Migrants Deaths, Rescue Beacons, Water Stations 2000-2007  
<http://www.humaneborders.org/news/documents/cumulativemap20002007.pdf>
- No More Deaths <http://www.nomoredeaths.org/>