



**opening borders**  
**ABRIENDO FRONTERAS**

**EL PASO, TEXAS—JUAREZ, MEXICO**  
**NOVEMBER 30—DECEMBER 5, 2015**

**LED BY BISHOP TERRY BRANDT**  
**EASTERN NORTH DAKOTA SYNOD/ELCA**

**EXPLORE ISSUES OF IMMIGRATION AND HEAR THE STORIES OF THOSE WHO LIVE THE DAILY STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL ALONG THE BORDER OF TEXAS AND MEXICO**

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## **ABRIENDO FRONTERAS—OPENING BORDERS**

### **Our Mission**

*Abriendo Fronteras—Opening Borders* cultivates peace and justice by creating opportunities for building relationships of mutual respect and dignity.

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### **Our Purpose**

We seek to

- Support and conduct travel delegations
- Create relationships among communities
- Provide transformative educational opportunities
- Offer experiences that motivate people to meaningful action, both locally and globally

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### **Two Fold Emphasis**

*Abriendo Fronteras—Opening Borders* has a two fold emphasis on opening borders of our minds, of thinking in new ways about people of other cultures. Immersion study programs bring people into the context of new cultures to help participants more fully understand new realities, resulting in improved understanding and bridge building between people.

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### **Immersion Experiences**

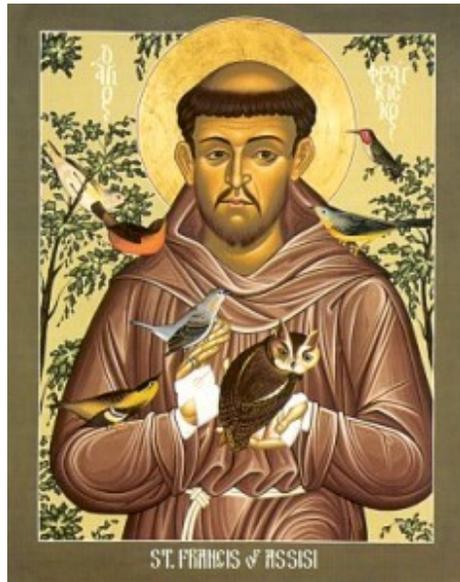
Transformative educational opportunities await those who are willing to move out of their comfort zone and experience the lives and culture, the stories and wisdom of those who live the daily struggle for survival along the border of Texas & Mexico. Within the context of community, shared observations and learning bring participants to a deeper level of understanding about immigration issues, the plight of women and children, shared cultural values, and deeper faith as we learn to know and value each other.

accompaniment of people in their struggles, and help us understand our own culture, lives, and faith more fully. Time is spent in the communities, learning and reflecting about border life. Staff on the border help facilitate these relationships, nurturing meaningful community for all.



**O**UR FIRST TASK IN  
APPROACHING ANOTHER  
PEOPLE  
ANOTHER CULTURE  
ANOTHER RELIGION  
IS TO TAKE OFF OUR SHOES  
FOR THE PLACE WE ARE  
APPROACHING IS HOLY.  
ELSE WE MAY FIND OURSELVES  
TREADING ON ANOTHER'S DREAM.  
MORE SERIOUS STILL,  
WE MAY FORGET...  
THAT GOD  
WAS THERE BEFORE OUR ARRIVAL

-MAX WARREN, MARYKNOLL MISSIONS



# Peace Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is discord, union;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is error, truth;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy;

O, Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

-Attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi

# CHRIST IN EXILE

Fleeing Bethlehem in ancient Palestine or new  
Seeking shelter for his wife and newborn child  
What father would refuse to scale a wall?  
If it meant they might live in peace some day?  
And yet, can anything good come from Darfur or Juarez?  
Can the Messiah be red or yellow or brown or black?  
Or even white?

Christ daily risks his life to enter unwelcome, unwanted,  
Undocumented, yes, even uninvited, into our complacent midst.  
His presence deeply disturbs our illusion of peace.

Faithful followers look for a cross without cost or discipleship  
without pain.

He asks for sacrifice; we offer our reasons why not.  
Each time "one of them" dies trying  
He dies again who came to destroy the divisions between us.

He comes to challenge our right to call ourselves, "Christian".

Christ the Exile, the Outsider, the Unemployed, the Alien  
Dares to defy our laws with his demand for sanctuary.

-Joseph R. Veneroso, M. M.



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ABRIENDO FRONTERAS

## DELEGATE INFORMATION

### What To Bring

Casual attire (no camouflage)  
(maybe something nicer for Mass/worship)

Pack some layers/warm clothes - hat—sunscreen  
(nights are chilly (30s) but can be nice during the days)

Journal Devotion/Reflection materials  
to lead morning reflection

Camera and film

Batteries

Toiletries—remember small ziplock for liquids on carryon  
Medications in original containers—Pepto Bismol

Non-disposable water bottle

Daypack

Hand sanitizer—

Insurance information

Passport

Good walking shoes

Flashlight

Spanish/English Dictionary if you have one

**Frequently Used Spanish Phrases** insert



## Culturally Speaking Who Are You?

Each of us is a **multicultural human being** with a wide range of forces, including biological and social that shape our world view. We all belong to a multiplicity of cultures. Understanding who we are culturally = first step in becoming interculturally competent.

As you interact with people during our visits, you will be representing your own culture. It's important to know why you do what you do and think like you do. Also, remember that the family and community that you were raised in help shape your ideas perspectives and world views. It's important to be aware of these influences as you try to understand the world views of others.

### “Human doing” introduction vs. “human being” introduction

Many people in the U.S. introduce themselves with their name, job title, and place of employment = “human doing” introduction. People from more relationship-oriented cultures often use a “human being” introduction which focuses attention away from the tasks we perform and the inaccurate job title we often have by drawing on what makes us unique as human beings.

These introductions helps you get to know one another culturally.

- Builds rapport and develops a team-orientation that focuses on deeper levels of relationship building.
- Starts with questions that emphasize each person's own identity and culturally-constructed world view.
- Developing high level of cultural self-awareness is one of the major intercultural competencies.

The second step is learning about culture general frameworks and theories such as communication styles that provide a backdrop for understanding cultures. The third step is applying this learning.

*Below are questions for “human being” introductions.*

### **NAME**

What is your full name that you were given at birth? Were you named after someone? What is your full name now? Do you have a nickname? What is the meaning of all your names? What is the language origin of your name? If you have multiple names, which name do you prefer, and why?

### **PLACE(S) OF ORIGIN:**

Where were you born? What do you consider your hometown? Home state? Home country? How many places did you live during your formative years (birth to age 20)? How have all the places you have lived





influenced your own worldview?

### **FIRST LANGUAGE:**

What is your first language? What languages did you hear while you were growing up at home? How does your first language influence the communication style that you have now? What other languages have you studied? Has studying another language shaped your worldview?

### **VALUES AND SHARED BELIEFS:**

Think about your home environment when you were growing up. Think about the people with whom you lived, the family members and friends with whom you interacted, and customs that you practiced during holidays or special days. How did these people influence your worldview? What core values and shared beliefs do you believe they passed on to you? What are some of your deeply-held values and beliefs? What do you stand for?

### **ETHNICITY AND RACE:**

Where did your parents and grandparents come from? Did they break through any barriers in order to achieve what they did in their lifetimes? If so, which ones, and how has this affected you? Which of their cultural traditions are part of your life today? Do you identify with any of those traditions today? How has your ethnicity and race influenced your worldview?

### **NATIONALITY:**

Do you identify with a particular nation more than another? What are some core values of that national identity culture that you think are significant? Do you identify with more than one nation? Do you identify with more than one cultural group within a particular nation? Which ones? Why? How has national identity influenced your worldview?

### **TRAVEL:**

Name a few places to which you have traveled that have provided you with a significant cross-cultural experience. How have your travels and face-to-face interactions with people from other cultures broadened your worldview? What other places have you lived, worked, studied in, or traveled through that have influenced your awareness of cultural differences? Have these experiences broadened your worldview? If so, how?

### **GENDER:**

How has your gender shaped your worldview? Your career goals? Your family's expectations of you? Your current family roles?



**AGE AND GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY:**

What generation do you most easily identify with? (for example: Veteran, Boomer, Gen X'er, Millennials)  
Relate an example of how your belonging to a specific generation has come to influence your worldview?

**OTHER CATEGORIES:**

There are many other components to one's cultural worldview, including birth order, vocation, profession, organizational memberships, hobbies and leisure activities, etc. How do some of these shape your world view?

We all belong to a multiplicity of cultures, and engaging in "human being" introductions is one way to help us realize who we are, and who others are, as *cultural beings*. Becoming culturally self-aware is an excellent intercultural competency to develop over time.

**Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights Fact Sheet** insert

## Border Calling

Anunciation House reaches out to the undocumented with faith and hospitality.  
by James Reel  
Sojourners Magazine

El Paso, Texas, from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, is a canal that a child could wade across. That, plus a gross disparity in job availability, wages, and quality of life. Not to mention official U.S. border policies designed to keep undocumented guest workers out, even while unofficial economic policies all but encourage American farms, restaurants, and hotels to hold consumer prices down by hiring undocumented laborers for the roughest, most menial work.

And so every year perhaps up to 4,000 people - no one is sure exactly how many - wade north across the canal when they think the Border Patrol isn't looking, or wedge themselves into the nooks of cars or vans crossing one of the congested bridges linking the cities across the Rio Grande, or pay *coyotes* and *polleros* - people-smugglers, the latter term meaning "chicken wranglers" - to sneak them across by some other means. Today, 8 to 12 million undocumented immigrants are in the United States, many of them living in hiding and in poverty.

Yet they needn't live without a home. Since the late 1970s, El Paso's Annunciation House has opened its doors to immigrants and refugees on the U.S.-Mexico border. The 20-volunteer organization includes a residence for immigrants trying to get on their feet, as well as separate facilities for those seeking political asylum and for women and children, and a building in a Juárez squatters' neighborhood that provides support and space for community-building efforts. Sometimes the Border Patrol looks the other way; sometimes it arrests Annunciation House volunteers. In early 2003, an agent shot and killed a 19-year-old guest who was running away with a pipe in his hand.

The work can be discouraging, but it's an essential component of its founders' faith. "We're working with an unequivocal certitude that for God there is no such thing as an illegal human being," says Ruben Garcia, Annunciation House's director. "And God would have no problem providing hospitality to these people."

IN 1976, GARCIA WAS running the youth department of the Catholic Diocese of El Paso. "The young adults I worked with wanted to buy into something that had depth and substance," he says, but they didn't know exactly what that might be. During weekly meetings over the next several months, the group reflected on how its members could live lives with meaning, and do so in a substantive way.

"As we reflected on scripture," he recalls, "we realized that the God we believe in is one who first and foremost identifies with people who are oppressed, people who are enslaved, the stranger in our midst, the poor. We realized what we needed to do was place ourselves among the poor in our own area."

In early 1978, five members of the group gained rent-free access to the second floor of a building owned by the diocese, still without a clear notion of what to do. "We started trying to understand where it was that the poor would take us," says Garcia.

The group had no money, and initially its members circulated through El Paso's improv-

erished neighborhoods, connecting people with social service agencies. Eventually they realized that the city's two homeless shelters would not accept undocumented immigrants. That's when the volunteers of Annunciation House discovered their mission.

By word of mouth, people began to hear about the house and guests began to arrive, seeking the very basic food and shelter Annunciation House could offer. There were only four or five at first, but within a few years the organization was offering hospitality to 120 people at a time. Garcia estimates that over the past quarter-century, Annunciation House has hosted more than 80,000 immigrants, refugees, and undocumented workers.

Although the origin of Annunciation House coincided with the Sanctuary movement, in which many American congregations declared their churches to be sanctuaries for people fleeing political upheaval in Latin America, Garcia's group stood apart from that effort.

"These churches would go through a long process of discernment to make the decision to declare sanctuary and take in a single family," says Garcia. "I'd tease them and say, 'You've gone through this long process to take in four people, but at Annunciation House we already have 100 people. You've got the theology, but we've got the bodies!'"

IN TRUTH, THEOLOGY - or, more precisely, faith - lies at the heart of the work at Annunciation House.

"The God that we believe in," says Garcia, "is a God who says, 'I am first and foremost in among the widow and the orphan, the stranger in a strange land.' So if we are to recognize that in our own work, it requires us to trust in the providence of God, to live simply, to make ourselves available to people without charging anything and without expecting anything in return.

"We said at the beginning that we should shy away from funding sources or resources that would try to control us or make us be something different from what we were trying to be. Almost 27 years later, Annunciation House continues to be sustained by the spontaneous commitment and generosity and solidarity of people, and of course by a volunteer staff. Individuals come from all over the United States and from six or seven countries to commit to living and working in our houses for one to three years at a time, with no financial help."

The ideal volunteer, says Garcia, can "walk on water and multiply loaves and fishes and turn water into wine." Short of that, he'll accept someone like Kansas-born Megan Hope, who first worked at Annunciation House when she was 22 and now, nine years later and after getting a master's in Latin American studies, is completing a second year with the organization.

"You don't know from one day to the next if you'll be helping somebody get medical assistance or get hooked up with a lawyer, or if you'll be running some errand, or talking to the Mexican consulate, or unclogging a toilet," she says.

"The difficult part is on an emotional basis. The first time I was here, I was really the only volunteer at one of the houses, with 15 guests. I came into Ruben's office crying, saying I hadn't done a very good job of meeting the needs of the guests, and that I sometimes felt incapable of doing anything worthwhile for them. He said he suspected I was experiencing my *own* poverty. What that means is sort of being broken up and made to realize how limited our capacity is for so many things, and realizing we don't have the power to change people's realities; sometimes we don't even have the ability to comfort people in the way we'd like to.

"Like our guests, all of us are on our own solitary journeys, with moments of doubt and loneliness and isolation and frustration, and with an incredible need for faith and hope."

Garcia's advice to other communities interested in starting an organization like Annunciation House is simple: "You don't need money and connections to make this succeed," he says. "You need trust. There has to be some sense of belief in what is calling you; even if it doesn't make sense, you continue to walk down the road."

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