

Staff Report – Inter-Franciscan Pilgrimage to the Migrants at the US/Mexico Border

From Nov. 3 to 6, 2022, Toby Harkleroad participated in an Inter-Franciscan border pilgrimage to the USA/Mexico border to attend the 25th annual border mass and to observe and accompany care and advocacy for migrants on both sides of the border. The delegation included members from all parts of the Franciscan family. The pilgrimage was organized and led by Lori Winther of the [Franciscan Network for Migrants](#) (RFM or Red Franciscana para Migrantes).

The delegation stayed at a rustic retreat center in El Paso and visited sites in Texas, New Mexico, and in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Sites visited included shelters and advocacy agencies on both sides of the border and a retreat center which uses its rooms for shelter on weekdays.

In the USA, [Annunciation House](#) and [Hope Border Institute](#) are important agencies which do an outsized amount of leadership in serving and advocating for migrants. Both agencies are closely associated with the Catholic Church. Las Americas is a secular legal aid agency that was founded by a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, it is the only agency providing direct legal aid in the area for migrants.

On the border, [mass was celebrated](#) for the 25th year commemorating those who have died attempting to cross the border (the Border Patrol reports at least 853 deaths this past year). The bishops of El Paso, Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Ciudad Juarez concelebrated the mass on a platform located in the center of the Rio Grande River. Catholics and others gathered on both sides of the border for mass and participants on the American side included Catholic school students from St. Louis. The Franciscan delegation was joined by local friars and was highly visible among the local clergy as well as some religious sisters.

In New Mexico, the delegation encountered Fr. Tom Smith, the director of the Holy Cross Retreat Center. Under Fr. Tom's leadership the Conventual-Franciscan retreat center has intentionally been [using its facilities to house and serve migrants on weekdays](#) when their rooms would otherwise be empty. Fr. Tom led a prayer service and urged the delegation to go beyond merely singing "All are Welcome" and to turn outward and bring others into our circle of Church: migrants, volunteers, supporters, everyone possible.

The visit to the Mexican side of the border was intense and emotional on the last day of the pilgrimage. The delegation visited [the only shelter operated by the local government](#) of Ciudad Juarez serving the migrants. The delegation also visited a new shelter operated by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd which serves women and children who have a strong chance of being accepted in the USA as asylum-seekers because they face extreme violence back home. In Ciudad Juarez the delegation spoke with the Mexican staff of RFM about how Franciscans work together on care and advocacy of migrants in Latin America.

While in Mexico, the delegation visited and reflected at the Mexican side of the notorious border wall. On the Mexican side of the border crossing the delegation [spent time among the Venezuelan migrants](#) recently expelled by the USA who are camped out along the Rio Grande hoping to enter the USA again despite Title 42 and other policies that prevent them from seeking asylum on American soil.

Inter-Franciscan Border Pilgrimage Delegation

Organized by [The Franciscan Network for Migrants](#) (RFM)

RFM is organized by the OFM JPIC Secretariat and serves the Franciscan Family throughout Latin America and is now seeking to integrate Inter-Franciscan advocacy and care for migrants in the USA

- Lori Winther, Franciscan Network for Migrants
- Odile Coirier, FMM
- Mary Soh, FMM
- Benedict Ayodi, OFM Cap, Franciscans International
- Jaroslaw (Jarek) Wysoczanski, OFM Conv
- Phil McCarter, OFM
- Tyler Grudi, OFM
- David Buer, OFM
- Iggy Harding, OFM
- Hajime Okuhara, OFM
- Jim McKintosh, OFM
- Mari Snyder, Franciscan Missioner
- Julia Pinto, Franciscan Missioner
- Tobias Harkleroad, OFS, Franciscan Action Network
- Betty Bishop, OFS
- Rosemarie LeClerc, OFS
- Dianna Kimling
- Alan Simpson
- Gigi Gregory, OFS
- Beatriz Calixto Toxqui, Franciscan Network for Migrants
- Vianey Martinez Lopez, Franciscan Network for Migrants
- Emelie Viklund, KIND (Kids in Need of Defense)
- Ramon Marquez, formerly of La 72 Migrant Shelter
- Omar Rios, Hope Border Institute





Agenda

FRIDAY – El Paso

- Casa Vides of [Annunciation House](#)
 - Ruben Garcia
- [Border Servant Corps](#)
 - Ceci Hernandez, OFS & Janet Kincaid
- Holy Family Shelter
 - Fr. Jarek, OFM Conv
- [Opportunity Center](#) Women's Shelter
 - Sr. Elise Gittrich, SC
- [Las Americas](#) Immigrant Advocacy Center
 - Marisa Limon Garcia & Staff

SATURDAY

- [25th Annual Border Mass](#)
 - Bishop Mark Seitz + Bishops of Las Cruces and Ciudad Juarez
- [Hope Border Institute](#)
 - Dylan Corbett
- [Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force](#)
 - Sr. Mary Soh, FMM & Nicole Schiff
- [Holy Cross Retreat Center](#) (New Mexico)
 - Fr. Tom Smith, OFM Conv

SUNDAY – Mexico

- [Kiki Romero Municipal Shelter](#)
 - Ciudad Juarez Gov't Staff
- The Mexican Side of the Border Fence & Tour of Juarez
- [Venezuelan Encampment at the Border Crossing](#)
 - Omar Rios
- [Red Franciscana para Migrantes](#) Mexico Team
 - Betty Calixto & Vianey Martinez
- [Casa Eudes Shelter](#)
 - [Sisters of the Good Shepherd](#) & Volunteers