



A screenshot from the video of the Love Knows No Borders demonstration by the American Friends Service Committee at the wall between Mexico and the United States at Border Field State Park.

A line in the sand

Standing our ground for justice at the border

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Dec. 10, the 70th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I along with 11 others in the AFSC Oregon delegation were in San Diego, California to participate in the American Friends Service Committee Week of Action, Love Knows No Borders, A Moral Call to Migrant Justice.

The week began on International Human Rights Day and concluded on Dec. 18, the UN International Migrant's Day. AFSC is a Quaker organization with a 101-year history of standing with migrants and doing justice with local and international organizations and border communities. They are known for their commitment to nonviolent social justice practice.

On Dec. 10 more than 400 people, a diverse group of ages, races, cultures, legal status and genders, gathered for the 1.5 mile walk to Border Field State Park on a spit of sand on the United States side of the border. There is a 30-foot high iron fence that descends from a hill into the ocean. Its purpose is to prevent anyone from Mexico or other countries from entering the United States without official permission.

The previous two days AFSC provided a four-hour training on nonviolent direct action. All participants agreed to a set of non-violent principles which would guide the march. The march was organized with peace keepers, medics, spokespeople, police liaisons, support volunteers to pick up trash and to provide water, and musicians to lead us in singing. Faith and community leaders led the march. After we turned from the path to walk on the sand, we fell silent. Silence is not only a Quaker spiritual practice, but one respected by other faiths. We were asked to remember the past and current violence of this space, a stolen land and a sacred space where many

have died.

For those of us not risking arrest, we were to maintain a space back from those crossing the line into "federal property" next to the fence. Organizers holding bird symbols high in the air were to indicate to us when to move forward and back. As we trudged through the sand, four to five helicopters circled overhead constantly; a patrol boat monitored the marchers from the ocean. Approximately 30 Border Patrol and Customs Enforcement SUV's and trucks perched at the top of the hill overlooking the park and several were on the road near the marchers – all with video cameras, binoculars and cameras with zoom lenses.

When those risking arrest entered the space next to the wall – a large sign proclaimed "No Trespassing" – U.S. government property. About 10 to 12 armed Border Patrol agents in riot gear descended the road onto the sand. They ordered those kneeling to stand and leave. No response. Then, a few people were led away by the armed men. Demonstrators knelt in front of border agents to bless the migrants in the caravan while singing "we will walk with you, and sing your spirits home."

Suddenly eight armed Border Patrol in riot gear with visors covering their faces, rushed into the water screaming at the persons praying. They seized Matthew Leber, AFSC staff person in a red Love Knows No Borders T-shirt, and held him down near the water. He had been standing behind the praying group to protect them from the incoming waves. When a peace keeper tried to intervene and lift Matthew up, a Border Patrol agent kicked Matthew back onto the sand and struck him in the knee with a police baton. Agents continued to yell – "Get Back! – to the prayer group. "Leave now!" they ordered. They knocked Matthew to the ground repeatedly before dragging him away. The arrest can be viewed at youtube/I05hIUDn5To.

The only violence on the sand came from

the U.S. tax-supported Border Patrol and Customs Enforcement agents who accosted, beat and dragged Matthew away while constantly threatening faith and community leaders with arrest. They also forced some of those taking the risk of arrest downward with face in the sand. They had the guns, the power and the authority to arrest all four hundred people gathered on the beach. Then the Border Patrol used the state park rangers to revoke the permitted march by announcing that the park is now closed and anyone remaining will be arrested. The State Park officials colluded with the Border Patrol to close the park.

Allegedly the Border Patrol's job is to protect the border. How is a group of non-violent persons singing and praying at the border a threat to the United States government?

We were there to call attention to the 5000 asylum seekers waiting in Tijuana for the chance to enter the United States. The three demands of the Week of Action were:

- Respect the human right to migrate and seek asylum
- End border militarization
- End immigration detention and defund Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CPB)

Matthew, a U.S. citizen, disappeared into the Border Patrol and Customs Enforcement system. He was released after public outcry and hundreds of calls. Neither the Border Patrol or Customs Enforcement are accountable to the U.S. public. They acted and act with impunity. No Border Patrol agent has ever been found guilty by U.S. courts of illegal acts and held responsible for their draconian actions against U.S. citizens, immigrants and citizens of Mexico. ACLU has documented three deaths by Border Patrol in Arizona, Texas, and southern California. No U.S. court has found a Border Patrol agent guilty of murder.

At the Interfaith service Sunday evening, Dec. 9 at a San Diego church, Rev. Dr. Traci Blackmon, the executive minister of Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ, prophetically proclaimed, "There are no peaceful protests. There are nonviolent protests but protest by definition means you are challenging injustice."

She called us to love people as an act of resistance against all the "isms," including racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-immigrant, and attacks on poor people. And always, to show up with love. We showed up with love. The empire responded and attacked Matthew Leber and arrested 30 faith leaders for crossing an imaginary line in the sand. Thanks to all the Oregonians who supported us in this action.

The work is just beginning. Our Congressional representatives must take action to ensure that refugees are allowed to apply for asylum, end the militarization, and stop the inhumane treatment by the Border Patrol and Customs Enforcement of people seeking a haven. Act now!

GET INVOLVED

To help the caravan of refugees from Central America at our borders, or to travel to San Diego and Tijuana, contact Pedro Sosa, Immigrant Rights Director, AFSC at psosa@afsc.org. To donate to the Migrant Caravan Emergency Response at the border, migrantjustice.afsc.org/donate. To learn more about the exodus of refugees from Central America, check out Washington Office on Latin America, www.wola.org; or www.AFSC.org, and www.lawg.org