

Good With God
February 5, 2012
Revs. Barbara and Bill Hamilton-Holway

Bill:

Mystery and wonder of the universe,
divine spark, creative force,
you who are never fully known,
beyond our seeing yet closer than breathing,
align the words of our lips with our actions.

Barbara:

Guide us to act in accord with what we hold deepest and dearest.
Live and love through us.

Bill:

We fall short. We suffer and witness suffering. We lose hope.
We come together here and begin again.

Barbara:

We could do this alone but it's sure easier together.
We remind one another of what's most important.

Bill:

Here together, voices raised in singing, sharing joys and sorrows,
exploring, learning, serving together supports us on our way.
To whatever opens our minds, our hearts, our hands, and our homes,
to whatever encourages us to be in good relationship with one another,
the community, and the earth, we give thanks.

Barbara:

Precious Source of Life, be with us,
draw forth our goodness, our love.

Bill:

Thank you for your messages of love and support during this time following my mother's death. There is a lot of theological diversity among us, and many ways to talk about God. Surely what matters are expressions of love. Our love and care for one another and for our world are what counts.

After the time with family, the two of us participated in UUA President Peter Morales' BorderLinks trip to the Arizona and Mexico border. What a great experiential, emotional, educational time! This border trip and others like it are set up to help us prepare for the gathering of Unitarian Universalists in Phoenix this coming June for a Justice General Assembly. UUs will learn, serve, and worship during the day and in the cooler evenings join with interfaith and community groups to witness and rally for immigration justice.

Immigration is a complicated issue. There are concerns of drugs and violence and human trafficking that are real. And, a great truth is that most people coming without documentation from Mexico to the United States are doing so to support themselves and their families. They are not dangerous, not violent. They, like most of our ancestors, come to this country for a better chance at life.

In our BorderLinks experience we participated with non-religious community organizations. Their good work is guided by morals, ethics, a human impulse toward fairness and justice.

We also participated with religious communities. Their faith in God sustains and compels them to do good. Good Without God and Good With God.

Today we share the work of some of the interfaith religious groups on the border. Next Sunday we'll tell of some of the work of non-religious organizations. All these groups touched our hearts. So many people of faith and people of conscience doing good.

No More Deaths is a community supported by religious groups. The Unitarian Universalists of Tucson sponsor No More Deaths. Retired minister Gene LeFebvre leads our group on a desert walk.

For most of his life and for thousands of years before that there was relatively free flow across the border to everyone's benefit. That all began to change in 1994. Since then, and particularly after September 11, 2001, there's been an increasing militarization of the border.

Walls have always failed. The Great Wall of China. The Berlin Wall. If completed, the Mexican/U.S. Border Wall would stretch almost 2000 miles at a cost of \$5 million dollars per mile.

385,000 people were arrested for crossing the border in 2007.

Probably one out of three or four people are caught.

Over 6,000 deaths have been confirmed in the desert with found remains.

6,000 plus deaths equal the number of U.S. soldiers who died in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Estimates are that only one out of 5 deaths are confirmed.

Migrants walk the harsh desert at night. One evening, I got an insight into the dangers of the rough terrain. I stepped off the road and walked into a cactus. My pants and leg were spiked with cactus needles.

Crossing the desert, people die of dehydration, of exhaustion, of hunger. Yet they keep coming. The call of a better life for oneself and one's family is stronger than the fear of death.

Our little group walks the desert. We come to a spot where a woman's body was found. A small shrine marks her death.

Border patrol, ranchers, minute men roam the desert armed with guns. No More Deaths volunteers, unarmed, trained in non-violence, walk the desert offering water, food, and first aid.

Laws in the U.S. restrict treatment for refugees.

No More Deaths believes there are higher laws than nation and state laws. Humanitarian aid is never a crime.

Guided by new testament scripture, No More Deaths does "not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, believing thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrews 13:2)

Barbara:

Kino Border Initiative is a cooperative effort

between six religious organizations.

Located in Mexico, Kino serves meals

to people recently deported from the U.S.

and dropped off at the border.

A painting on the wall of Kino's dining hall depicts a Last Supper

where all the people round the table are Latino and Latina men and women.

The night we serve

about 60 male guests and 10 to 12 women come to dinner.

Father Pete, a long-time activist, supervises the dinner.

He tells us most of our guests have never eaten in a restaurant,
never been served by white people.

He tells us what an impact we can have by simply showing respect.

The Kino staff are guided by the teachings of Jesus,

“I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. Whenever you did one of these things

to someone overlooked or ignored

you served me.” (Matthew 25:35)

Our delegation lines up at the door.

This could be an intimidating gauntlet.

Each guest shakes each of our hands, offers greetings and gratitude.

We serve the meal as if we are serving the most prestigious people.

The guests show such dignity.

Some are limping.

Some have their feet still bandaged from their desert crossing.

Our eyes meet in our common humanity.

The meal becomes an authentic communion.

At the dinner table, we talk with a man whose home is in Vacaville

where he has worked as a gardener for 18 years.

His wife and two children, 17 and 14, are in Vacaville.

He was stopped for not having on his seat belt.

When he had no driver's license, he was detained and then deported.

He knows no one in Mexico.

We learn neighboring shelters can only offer beds for three nights.

After that, people spend the night sleeping in the cemetery.

When the dishes are all washed and dried and the last guest departs,
the emotion our group has been feeling comes out in tears.

The next day we visit the Federal Court House in Tucson.

We enter a courtroom

to see just about the same numbers of men and women filling the room
as those who filled the dining room the previous night.

The people look like the same humble people
who touched our hearts that night.

But here in the courtroom,
rather than showing each person respect and dignity,
each person has a chain around their waist,
their hands cuffed, their ankles shackled.

In small groups these people hobble,
chains clanking, to stand before the judge.

When asked if they have illegally entered the country, they answer yes.

The judge sentences them from 75 days to 125 days.

Most are jailed in privately owned, federal tax-supported detention centers. None are here for
drugs or violence or human trafficking,
only for being in this country without papers.

No one goes to law school to be in such a rote mechanical process. Prosecuting attorneys,
public defenders, the judge go through motions

as people are sentenced and then led out of the room.

Surely no one likes or wants this.

The system demeans all.

Bill:

We leave the courtroom and meet with a federal public defender. Though this legal routine happens 5 days a week, every week, the public defender says it never gets easy. This “streamlining” process has happened for three years. Previously people caught crossing the border were deported in what was called “catch and release.” Now they are detained, sentenced, serve time and then are deported.

Since September 11, 2001, stronger anti-terrorism measures keep getting set. Zero tolerance of migration is meant to deter crossing borders. Everyone apprehended is prosecuted. Every weekday Tucson processes 70 people, while nine other border courts each process 100 people a day. That’s over 700,000 people in three years.

The public defender tells us the private detention centers make the county jails look like hotels.

She says, **not one terrorist** has been caught crossing from Mexico.

Such a waste of money, such a waste of human lives.

Barbara:

The Restoration Project, Casa Mariposa,

is an intentional ecumenical community.

They blend faith and action.

We met a young woman Rachel who lives in this spiritual community. Nearby at the Greyhound Bus station, migrants without papers,

who are released from jail on bond, are dropped off at midnight.

Many of these people know no one in Tucson and don’t know the area. They find themselves at midnight alone in an unknown place.

A member of the Restoration Project meets them

as they come off the bus

and invites them to be their guest for the night.

Imagine the courage this takes –

dark of midnight, strangers, inviting them to your home.

Rachel tells us they are a community

who seeks to live in right relationship with one another,

the community and the earth

through hospitality, simple and sustainable living,
playful spirituality, and peaceful, prophetic action.

What amazing young people!

We join them for a community dinner.

We talk with one of their guests, Catalina,

a twenty-two year old woman, travelling alone from the Dominican Republic,
with all her family's savings and hopes.

She was arrested and jailed for six months for not having papers.

Now she is out on bail.

Her heart sings with gratitude for this community

who open their home and hearts to her.

Here she has a bed, meals, clothing, resources, support.

Though her future is uncertain, her eyes shine,

her face open as she beams on us a wide smile.

She tells us she puts her faith in God,

and this community of angels has come to her.

During the Civil Rights movement,

singing African American spirituals

helped people to keep faith,

to keep going amidst struggles and suffering.

Somewhere there must be something better, greater, more loving,

more just than whatever hardships there now are.

This yearning for something people call God

keeps people working for justice and beloved community.

Bill:

We give thanks for all the goodness we experienced on our BorderLinks trip. The UUA will be sponsoring more BorderLinks trips both before and after General Assembly in Phoenix in June. We invite you to participate in one and to come to Phoenix to join with other interfaith groups and community groups to witness for immigration justice. The people you meet, the groups you'll experience will change your heart.

God, one name for what is bigger than we are,

word for our deepest longing,

for our highest aspirations,

be with us.

Open our hearts, our hands, our minds.

Barbara:

Guide us to cross borders of all sorts.

Connect us with our human family.

Grow our compassion.

Both:

Make us instruments of your peace. Amen.

Good Without God
February 12, 2012
Revs. Barbara and Bill Hamilton-Holway

We believe in human goodness.
Yet, in all our faces every day is the great harm
people can do to one another.
Wars, violence, racism, greed fill the news.
In our day-to-day lives,
we encounter selfishness and pettiness,
frustration, anger and blame.
It's true.
And we witness people
be generous, imaginative, compassionate,

respond to one another with tenderness, support and care.
Look around and you see much human goodness every day.

Most people are like you
wanting to make a difference,
to be helpful,
to make life meaningful through doing good.
Most people are good at heart.

You can make a case for human depravity
and choose to believe people are bad.

But, for many of us,
keeping faith with the goodness of the human heart
helps make goodness.
We humans survive because we come together in caring ways.
In the midst of injustice,
there are human beings
who respond with courage and goodness.

Their actions, large and small, inspire more.
Goodness grows.
We put our faith in one another
and our human potential for goodness.

The two of us participated
in UUA President Peter Morales'
BorderLinks trip to the Arizona/Mexico border.
What a great experiential, emotional, educational time!
This border trip and others like it
are set up to help us prepare
for the gathering of Unitarian Universalists in Phoenix
this coming June for a Justice General Assembly.

The last week of June in Phoenix,
UUs will learn, serve, and worship during the day
and in the cooler evenings
join with interfaith and community groups
to witness and rally for immigration justice.
More UUA BorderLinks trips are planned for April and May
with more to follow after General Assembly,
We hope you'll plan to participate in General Assembly.
Will you please rise or wave your arm in the air,
if you are thinking of going to GA in Phoenix?
Flyers about GA and about BorderLinks trips
will be available in the Atrium.
Please consider participating.

At the border our group leaders were bi-national.
We participated with religious communities.
Their faith in God sustains

and compels them to do good.
We also participated with community organizations.
They do good guided by morals, ethics,
a human impulse toward fairness and justice.
Good with God and good without God.
And the good news is both groups work together.
Last Sunday we shared
the work of some of the interfaith religious groups on the border.
This morning we'll tell of some of the work of community organizations.
All these groups touched our hearts.
So many people of faith and people of conscience do good.

The organization Scholarships AZ believes every student deserves
a right to higher education regardless of immigration status.
In Tucson, we meet six Arizona students
from high schools and a community college.
Each of them tells their story.
These students arrived in this country
when they were young children.
They've spent almost all of their lives here
and gone through the school system.
65,000 students without documents
graduate from high school each year.
Only 5% attend college.
We listen to the students' stories.

They are bright, articulate, bi-lingual, hard-working.
They are in honors and Advance Placement courses
and rank high in their classes.
They dream of being doctors, lawyers, psychologists.
We need their passions and talents.
Their classmates ask them, "What college are you going to?"
They tell us how hard it is to answer.
Their counselors ask them, "What college are you going to?"
They feel shame.
They fear revealing they have no documents, no social security numbers.
Lower in-state tuition, scholarships,
and higher education are not possible.
A wall stands between these students and their dreams.

One young woman, tears streaming down her cheeks,
asks us if we saw the youtube video
where two high school girls talk.
The two tell young women like her.
"Go back to Mexico and have babies."
She says, "it's painful to know that's what people think of you."
She says, "I want to be an engineer."

She is grateful for all the people of good heart at Scholarships AZ .
people like her who openly tell their stories of living without documents.
They share her dreams and are her mentors and heroes.
She learns from them about creative fundraising, accepting help,
and being proud of who she is.

I feel shame when I hear these students.
I feel shame
that we aren't making possible their higher education.
I want them to be courageous, strong,
to know how intelligent and beautiful they are.
I want doors to open for them.
I want to help.
Their education serves and benefits us all.

In the face of obstacles, walls of prejudice,
a community college student, Anisa, stays determined.
She says, "I'm not afraid to hear a 'No' from someone
because I know that someone else will say, 'Yes.'
I know if I get the opportunity
I can make a huge difference in my community."

At the border in Mexico resides the Home of Hope and Peace.
This community organization provides
adult education and job training,
a community garden,
nutritious lunches for children,
and children's camps.
The camps' theme is A Culture of Peace.
They teach active non-violence and conflict resolution.

At the Home of Hope and Peace,
women learn their rights to be treated with respect
and find safety from domestic violence.
The Home of Hope and Peace advocates for sources of
employment in Mexico with healthy, fair working conditions.
They operate a woman's cooperative.
Crafts are made and sold and provide an economic alternative.
Their mission is to make immigration an option
rather than an obligation.

The Home of Hope and Peace Director Jeannette Pazos tells us,
November 20 is the annual celebration of the Mexican Revolution.
Soldiers parade.
Men grow their moustaches bigger.
Flags wave.
People fire guns into the air.
Kids carry toy guns and wear bandoleers,
straps of bullets across their chests.

At The Home of Hope and Peace they ask,

Who benefits from this telling of the revolutionary story?
Who are today's revolutionaries?
What story needs to be told?
The Home of Hope and Peace joins the parade.
Their children parade with no toy guns.
The children dress in traditional costumes.
Instead of carrying guns,
they carry images of peace,
The Home of Hope and Peace flag.
They carry banners: I have a right to food.
I have a right to dignity.
I have a right to housing.
Don't touch me. I'm a kid.

One banner we saw in Nogales is of a peace dove.
The words proclaim:
I have a right to live a life free of violence.

We revolutionize, the director says.

Nogales, Jeanette tells us in softly spoken words,
has a particular beauty.
Maybe sunsets are as beautiful where you live,
she whispers.
Up on this hill, birds fly freely.
No wall holds them back.

Sunset, the work day begins for the migrant.
Crossing the desert is dangerous.
She sees migrants' feet with the blistered soles peeling off.
The migrant yearns to cross to be reunited with family.
She talks with Border Patrol.
They tell her they are at risk in the desert.
Wild animals, criminals.
Their great hope is to make it home at night to their family.

She tells us in her heart
she knows the migrant and the border patrol are the same.
They both just want to be with their loved ones.
The system blinds us to the truth; we are brothers and sisters.
Our work is hard, she says, but inspiring.
We plant ideas with the new generations.
The young people are budding, blossoming.

What can all of us here do?
Gather in community to learn more.
Second Wednesdays 7:30 – 9:00, Elisabeth and Katherine Jay
lead the UUA's Immigration Curriculum.

Third Wednesdays, that's this coming Wednesday,
gather at 5:30 outside the West County Detention Center

at 5555 Giant Highway in Richmond for an interfaith immigration vigil.

Our offering this month supports East Bay Sanctuary Covenant
who support, protect and advocate
for immigrants and refugees.

Speak appreciation
for whatever you see people doing that creates good.
Whatever.
Appreciate someone's being a good parent, a good teacher,
a good volunteer.

Thank you for getting out and coming here on Sunday,
for bringing your energy to this community.
Thank you for your reaching out to greet people you don't yet know.
Being here changes us.

In *all about love*, poet bell hooks writes,
"Enjoying the benefits of living and loving in community
empowers us to meet strangers without fear
and extend to them the gift of openness and recognition.

Just by speaking to a stranger,
acknowledging their presence on the planet,
we make a connection....
We can begin the process of making community wherever we are.
We can begin by sharing a smile, a warm greeting,
a bit of conversation...."

We give thanks for your presence on the planet.
We give thanks for all the good people
we met on our BorderLinks trip.
Everyone we met thanked us for coming.
They cheer UUs coming to Phoenix in June.
The more people who show up for any vigil or rally or public witness, the
more attention comes to immigration and justice.
They tell us the change in immigration
will come from people like us.

We invite you to come to Phoenix
to join with other interfaith groups and community groups
to witness for immigration justice.
The people you meet, the groups you'll experience will change your heart.

Let the goodness of the human spirit
open our hearts, our hands, our minds.

Guide us to cross borders of all sorts.

Connect us with our human family.
We are brothers and sisters.

Plant what you long to see bud and blossom.
Grow your compassion.

Let the day come when no wall holds anyone back,
When the dove of peace flies freely.
Love guide us on our way.