



DC Peace Team

Cultivating Nonviolent Peacemaking
and Resistance

Posadas: San Diego and Tijuana Border

Dec. 15, 2018

We were invited by the local organizers of the Posadas event in San Diego and Tijuana. Posadas is a tradition, particularly in Hispanic communities. It directly connects with the quest to be allowed into a safer, welcoming space in the context of the Christian story. The organizers were concerned about counter-protestors and police/military action.

In turn, our vision was to offer nonviolent protective accompaniment (or unarmed civilian protection) to support the movement for migrant justice and to illuminate the dignity of all persons. A hope was that through this experience, training, and community building we might help enable such a practice to continue longer-term in this border area as needed and primarily led by local persons. Our trainer was a local activist and accompanier with Activate Labs. Our team consisted of a mix of locals and others from Washington DC, Portland, New York, and Denver. The Meta Peace Team, Vets for Peace, and Global Immersion all participated with us.

Our primary goals were to 1) accompany those most in need. 2) prevent and defuse hostility/violence, 3) interrupt de-humanization, and 4) re-humanize and cultivate empathy. Such protective accompaniment acknowledges the value of constructive conflict and thus does not intend to prevent such conflict by those resisting injustice.

On Friday Dec. 14th, we offered a training with the help of Sanctuary Caravan who provided a space for us. Some of us visited Tijuana and talked to people at one of the migrant camps near Benito Juarez. We saw tired, worn out, overwhelmed faces. Even children slumbered around. We met a member of Border Angels who delivered food and other supplies. We also saw the space at the border port of entry where migrants got their numbers. Volunteers mingled with them to provide legal assistance and food. We met a few families staying with a local church. One woman shared a story of returning to Guatemala after her husband was deported only to then experience domestic violence. She had a couple young children with her. Another man shared a story of local harrasment, gun holes in his house, his daughter being threatened, and then giving up his home and job to flee with the migrant exodus for safety with his family.

On Saturday Dec. 15th was the Posadas event. In the early morning we heard of a pro-border wall rally at San Ysidro, the nearby port of entry. Lauren and I showed up to see the size and possible

plans. About 20-25 people were gathered along a fence above the freeway. We talked with a couple participants. One lady was relatively calm and expressed concern for the safety of people living in the U.S. and the need to focus our resources on those living on the streets in the U.S. Another lady was quite angry and spoke with an anxious pace naming all the worst possible elements of the migrants. We centered ourselves and listened. We shared some of the stories we heard from the migrants the day before. We had some thoughtful exchanges with the first woman, and tried to offer reflective listening, acknowledgements of feelings, and patience with the second lady. A local press person saw us. They asked us why we were willing to dialogue and if we had any hope in such exchanges. We spoke about the value of encounter and planting seeds, as well as how the different spaces people were in determined our approach.

Soon we had to get to our next location to meet the full team. We had about eight people on the San Diego side and joined a group of about twenty people on the Tijuana side. On the San Diego side, we split into affinity teams, shared communication signals, and determined positions. We spent time talking to participants in the event in order to build trust, particularly if any destructive conflict arose later. The event began with a press conference. Then we walked about 1-2 miles down a long dirt road until we reached the beach and turned left toward the border fence(s). We spread out with the group, continued to build trust with individuals, and kept an eye out for counter-protestors. As the group reached the small grassy area looking out over the beach and across from the two border fences, we saw the Posada gathering on the Tijuana side. We also noticed about 30 military soldiers with heavy arms stationed between the two fences and a line of 7-8 border patrol vehicles on a nearby road. A handful of police and border patrol wandered around the vicinity.

Soon thereafter, a group of 10-20 pro-border wall folks with U.S. and Trump flags walked up the beach as we had done. They stayed on the beach but right at the permitted edge of the border fences. We positioned some DC Peace Team folks between both groups along the dirt path leading up to the grassy area. I decided to slowly make my way toward this group to try and diminish the chances for destructive conflict. I made some small talk with a couple teenage latino boys who were part of this group. As a press person interviewed one of them, another 30-40 year old latino man started a dialogue with me. I shared some of the stories of migrants from yesterday. He expressed sympathy for their plight as a Mexican-American. He wanted people to obey the laws, respect sovereignty, and follow morality. He also thought if people wanted to help the migrants then to just go to Mexico or their home countries and help them, rather than bring them into the U.S. Another white woman jumped in with a lot of stereotypes about me, anger, and rehashing of all the worst things she has heard about migrants. I offered some reflective listening, but tried to turn my attention back to the man. I affirmed his concern for the rule of law and for morality. I wondered with him about whether some of our laws were just, i.e. moral. I shared about people having to wait 10-20 years to get in according to the legal process. Was that just when they had urgent needs? I also mentioned international law such as the declaration of human rights. He wondered about that question for a bit and wasn't sure. I shared about the

opportunity to help others as a different posture to consider. Another latina women who was listening expressed anger at people “using her skin color” to legitimate a political agenda and for profit. She also shared of her own domestic abuse, raising a child alone, and taking little food stamps. I affirmed her courage to make it through that. I shared how there was an opportunity to help that was driving many people to respond with welcome to the migrants, which is not the same as a political agenda and certainly not a quest for profit. I requested she explain more to me about her sense of people “using her skin color,” as I was still trying to understand the need. The white woman kept interrupting and distracting us. After some more reflective listening, I invited her to be careful about stereotyping me or others. I said that I was trying to listen, understand, have a dialogue, and perhaps cultivate some empathy. As the coversation moved on, I ended with some quality time with the man. We spoke about faith and values, as wellll as a shared search for truth and justice. We affirmed a willingness to continue the dialogue and shared some contact information.

After making my way back to the Posada group and the moving call and response with the Tijuana posada group, we walked with the San Diego group back to our starting point. The police called the group to walk back a different way to avoid the counter-protestors and the organizers obliged. Yet, in our way back the counter-protestors still found us and yelled some things. A few of us in the peace team worked to engage them either to distract or to have some small talk. I noticed the lady who I spoke to earlier in the day at the fence above the freeway. We acknowledged each other and I was able to distract her a bit. I met their main organizer and asked if she was willing to be part of a formal dialgoue with some of the Posada organizers. She said sure and took my contact information. Some in the peace team started walking back with the rest of the Posada folks and others walked with the pro-border wall folks. Notably, these groups of about 10-15 people each at this point were walking and talking right next to eachother. Perhaps, this shared walking and dialogue was a small window or icon of what might be possible on a larger scale when we offer nonviolent protective accompaniment.

By Eli McCarthy