



*“Kids Crossing” image above, by Paula Wendland, depicts two unaccompanied migrant children—a brother and his younger sister, on their perilous journey north seeking asylum.*

# ASYLUM SEEKING: WHAT SIDE ARE YOU ON?

## FAMILY FRIENDLY EDUCATION AND ACTION RESOURCE

### Section 1: Asylum Seeker Journeys & Root Causes

### Section 2: Unaccompanied Minors: Alone & Seeking Hope Again

### Section 3: Seeking Repair of Our Broken and Inhumane Asylum Policies

### Section 4: Alternatives to Detaining Children & Families

### Section 5: Harmful Impacts of “Migrant Protection Protocols”

### Section 6: Prayer Vigil Resources

***A Note To Parents and Educators: This resource provides you with information which we expect you to modify and explore as most appropriate for the children and youth with whom you are working.***

***The reality of children of all ages being “detained in cages”, separated from parents and/or being abused or trafficked is a haunting reality for these migrants seeking asylum.***

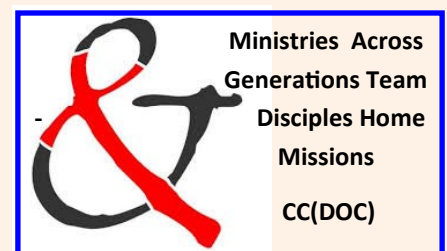
***We offer the “Faces and Laces” project (at the end of this resource) in which the imagery of shoelaces is lifted up, at the request of border shelters, as a meaningful symbol of migrant injustice which younger children may be able to grasp without stirring too much unhelpful anxiety or fear for themselves or the migrant children. Please feel free to contact Rev. Kate Epperly, at [kepperly@dhm.disciples.org](mailto:kepperly@dhm.disciples.org) or Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea at [sstanley@dhm.disciples.org](mailto:sstanley@dhm.disciples.org) if you have any questions or concerns.***

*Information herein was assembled initially as part of an Advent and Epiphany devotional resource by IIC Holy Days & Holidays Team and Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries. Adaptations by DHM’s Justice for Families and Children.*

**INTERFAITH**  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
**IMMIGRATION**  

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**COALITION**



Who are “asylum seekers,” and why are 56,000\* of them camped in tent cities in Mexico awaiting sanctuary in the United States right now?

**\* (as of Jan. 25, '20 & growing by thousands!)**



Mural by Leo Tanguma, at Denver International Airport.

## Asylum Seeker Journeys & Root Causes

Isaiah 2:4-5 gives us a vision of a world of peace in which all will “beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.” Our world is far from such a world of compassion and peace. The Denver International Airport’s “Children of the World Dream Peace” mural (above) inspires us to think about it. **What do you see in this mural?**



Santa Barbara, Honduras. Human Rights Leaders bravely fighting loss of indigenous water rights.

**Reflection:** Did you know that every day in our world there are approximately 70 million people called “asylum seekers” who leave their own country because they are afraid for their own or their family’s safety because of war, or gang violence, or persecution due to their race, religion, social group, or political opinion? They pack up the few belongings they can carry and take many risks to travel many miles so that they can cross over into another country where they hope to find safety and protection. Each country has its own legal asylum granting program which gives “refugee” status to people who can prove their need for protection and safety.

Churches in the United States have always helped refugees make new homes in our country. Refugee resettlement is done through our Refugee and Immigration Ministry in partnership with Church World Service. Sadly, this year our government is only welcoming 18,000 refugees. (In past years we welcomed 95,000). That said, there are 60,000 people seeking asylum who are suffering mightily as they wait for months in tent camps for court hearings in which they will either be approved for asylum or learn that they must return home. This can result in great suffering or even death. **Of the 60,000 people returned and/or waiting in tent cities, 16,000 of these asylum seekers are children and 500 are babies. Can you imagine living in a tent for months? Worse yet, while these persons wait in tent cities in Mexico they have their shoelaces taken away.** This makes them vulnerable to bad gangs (cartels) and bullies (human traffickers). **Have you ever tried to run without shoelaces in your shoes? It is difficult. In addition, not having shoelaces “marks” them as vulnerable to be preyed upon.**

**Action: #Faith4asylum Day of Prayer** January 29, 2020 was exactly one year since the policy of making asylum seekers wait in Mexico (Migrant Protection Protocols/MPP/Remain in Mexico) was implemented. Other “anniversary” dates of this policy in various border sectors will continue throughout the year, and other policies such as “PACR” and “HARP,” plus multiplying returns of migrants to Mexico and Central America since COVID-19, are harming opportunities for asylum and even sending families straight back into dangers in the nations from which they’d escaped. Join the ask by the [Interfaith Immigration Coalition](#) to remember asylum seekers by holding prayer services and learning about policies causing suffering. Share the ways we can take action to work together for compassion, protection and justice for their human rights and dignity in the name of Jesus Christ! (Matthew 25:34-40)

**Prayer:** *Forgive us, God who seeks justice, for our slowness to cease our implications in evil. Turn us, God of all, to give attention to your children displaced and seeking safety. And lead us on a path towards plowshares, that we might walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.*

- Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries.

See [NPR “Root Causes of Migration in Central American Countries”](#); recent changes in policies from [PBS Frontline here](#); and read “Return to Danger” [August Report](#) from the Human Rights First organization which chronicles in detail the dangers of the “Remain in Mexico”

## Unaccompanied Minors: Alone & Seeking Hope Again

*“The desert and the parched land will exult....They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song....Be strong, fear not! Here is your God...he comes to save you.” Isaiah 35:1-4*

**Reflection:** I have lived for several years in the Southwest U.S. where I found myself fascinated by the desert. One of my favorite things to do was to go on a hike in the desert when the cacti were in bloom. Deserts have their beauty, but on the whole they are not hospitable to human life. Many dangers can lurk behind a willow tree, sagebrush or a stand of rocks. Also, it is very challenging, if not almost impossible to walk in the desert on very hot days. There are compassionate volunteers who risk their own lives to leave food and water in the southern desert to provide life saving help to immigrants trying to make their way across our southern border. Un-accompanied minors (teens and children), have died in the desert trying to reach our southern border in their search for asylum. ***Can you imagine walking through the desert or riding on the top of a boxcar for thousands of miles as a child or youth in order to look for a better life for yourself and your family?*** (See: **Enrique’s Journey** by Sonia Nazario for one well researched story.) To these young migrants, there is no other option—no other chance for a new life. The desert is no friend. And in addition to wildlife, they also often can fall prey to human “coyotes” along the way.

**What is a “coyote” in border language?** It is a person who guides immigrants, usually for a hefty price, across the desert, past immigration authorities and through dangers into the United States.



**Story:** Erminia migrated to the U.S. two years ago from El Salvador when she was 15 years old. She dreams of being a family lawyer. On her first night walking through the Texas desert, Erminia’s shoes fell apart. She spent the subsequent three days and two nights crossing the desert wearing only her socks. “There were so many thorns,” she recalls, “and I had to walk without shoes. The entire desert.”

When he was 13 **Mauricio’s** mother paid to bring him across the Mexican border. He was passed between “coyotes”, and nearly fell victim to a scam. “(A coyote) told me that if I didn’t want to walk, I had to pay seven thousand dollars,” he says. Mauricio was able to call his mother for help and reunite with her. Now he wants to value her sacrifice and succeed in his new home. “For me, the American dream consists of overcoming, of happiness, and of reunification with your family.”

**Actions:** Learn more about this situation and continue to pray for and advocate for unaccompanied minors, and let your representatives and senators know of your concerns about ways they are being treated and held in detention:

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5805654/>
2. <https://theintercept.com/2019/10/29/mexico-migrant-unaccompanied-children-border-crossing/>
3. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/29/world/americas/unaccompanied-minors-border-crossing.html>
4. <https://cis.org/Report/Unaccompanied-Alien-Children-and-Crisis-Border>

**Prayer:** *Jesus, as an infant you fled to Egypt with your mother Mary and Joseph. You were a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and sustenance. Help us to welcome those like you who cross our borders today. We entrust to your protection especially those young people who may be alone in trying to seek asylum in our country. Give us hearts of compassion, humane response, and laws that respect of all immigrants. Amen. (Adapted from Education for Justice)*

**By Sister Maria Orlandini, Franciscan Action Network.**



**INTERFAITH  
IMMIGRATION  
COALITION**

## Seeking Repair of Our Broken and Inhumane Asylum Policies

*“The Lord will give you a sign: The woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.” Isaiah 7:14*

**Reflection:** The young woman will bear a son and they shall name him God-With-Us. That is the promise of the prophets and the hope of Israel. That promise is fulfilled; that hope realized in the miracle of light, the miracle of God-With-Us. The Holy One has chosen to become one like us and to walk among us still. That is the mystery of the incarnation that we celebrate at Christmas.

As persons of faith who follow in the way of Jesus, we believe that our God walks among us still in the guise of the immigrant, the refugee, the asylum seeker. Will we welcome our God made flesh in these refugees and asylum seekers, as Mary and Joseph welcomed Jesus into their hearts and into their home? Will we advocate for compassion and justice for these families and children?



Since 2017, our government has continually made it more difficult for us to welcome those seeking refuge. The administration has tightened the rules regarding asylum and has applied ever harsher standards in reviewing asylum applications. Migrants are fleeing their homes to seek refuge in the U.S. because they have heard that in America people are free and the U.S. government just. We pray it may be so someday soon.

**Story:** Kimberlyne and her 5-year-old daughter, asylum seekers from El Salvador, were returned to Mexico by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security following an initial hearing in the El Paso immigration court. They were sent back to Ciudad Juárez under the Trump Administration’s Migration Protection Protocols, also known as Remain in Mexico.

No sooner had they arrived, then they were kidnapped just outside of an Instituto Nacional de Migración office. Kimberlyne’s family was forced to pay a ransom to secure their release. When Kimberlyne attempted to make a police report, officers refused telling her that “nothing had happened” and that it “was just a scare.” Terrified of being kidnapped again, Kimberlyne and her daughter found temporary accommodation with a local woman, but, she says, “I’ll have to leave soon.” For more information on this and similar situations see: [\*Delivered to Danger: Illegal Remain in Mexico Policy Imperils Asylum Seekers’ Lives and Denies Due Process. Human Rights First. Report: August 2019.\*](#)

**Actions:** As people of faith we are called to protect the vulnerable and stand with those in need. In our prayers may be particularly mindful of those threatened by the administration’s decision to return those seeking refuge from violence and fear in their home countries to Mexico to await their chance to plead for their right under international law to asylum in our country.

- Voice your support for asylum seekers as you [Send an Action Alert](#) to the Department of Homeland Security asking them to rescind the "Remain in Mexico" policy and support asylum seekers.
- Call your Members of Congress (202-224-3121) and share Kimberlyne’s story, remind them of our obligations under international and national law, and ask them to protect the right to seek asylum in the U.S.
- Write an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor and educate your neighbors about the injustice of our current asylum policy and practice.

**Prayer:** *Good and gracious God, thank you for the many ways you reveal yourself to us—in the kindness of a grandmother, the generosity of a neighbor, the comfort of a friend. Give us eyes to see the goodness of your light in the faces of our immigrant neighbors. Give us ears to hear the good news of your word made flesh in those seeking safety at our borders. Give us courage to stand with asylum seekers now threatened by our own government, and with all in need, as we come your incarnate love made flesh. Amen.*

**INTERFAITH  
IMMIGRATION  
COALITION**

## Alternatives to Detaining Children & Families

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.” Isaiah 9:2-7*

**Reflection:** Brutality, poverty, and hunger define the darkness that engulfs a conquered people whose safety and security have been stripped away. In this land of deep darkness, its inhabitants hold no power and are without hope. Into this darkness the prophet announces a shining light! God is the deliverer who brings God’s people from oppression to freedom; from darkness to light.

Our hope is renewed as we turn our hearts and our devotion to the “light of all people” (John 1: 4-5), born in the child of Bethlehem. Christian faith names the light as Jesus Christ and understands that the vocation of all human beings is to reflect that light through deeds of compassionate love.

**Story:** Esther (name changed for protection) looks forward to the joyful day when her children will graduate from an American high school and her family will celebrate each of their accomplishments. She has plans at that point to complete her training to become a registered nurse. In the meantime, she waits eagerly, and not without apprehension, for her immigration hearing to determine if she will be granted asylum.

When Esther applied for asylum, she was told that the process could take as long as three years. Many who have fled violence, poverty and hunger in their home countries are forced to wait, languishing in prisons and detention centers and camp cities, for the date of their asylum hearing. Single men wait long lonely years in prison facilities; families are separated and stripped of hope and power. But there are alternatives to detention.

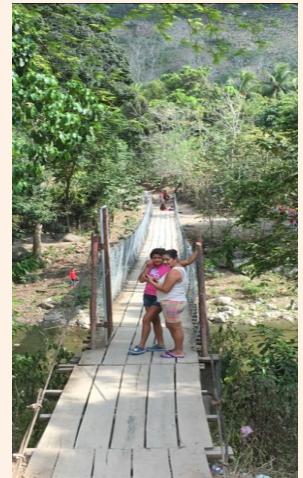
One congregation reflected God’s light to Esther and her four children when the congregation felt called to provide temporary housing for families seeking asylum. With a safe and secure place to live and congregation members to walk with them on their journey, the children are enrolled in school, Esther has a reliable job, they have chosen a church where they worship, and have made friends. Esther and her children are beginning a new life. Even as they await the outcome of their asylum application, they are walking in the light with hope and gratitude.

**Actions:**

- Write a card or send a gift that offers hope! Go to [www.lirs.org/hope-in-detention](http://www.lirs.org/hope-in-detention) to download the Toolkit: “Hope Can’t Be Quarantined: How to Support Migrants in Detention” from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service; including sample Spanish letters to write, learning resources, and more!
- Learn more about Alternatives to Detention, and how faith partners can support them, [here](#).
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**Prayer:** *God who came to free your children from bondage, we pray for all who today awake behind bars or in tents, who are made cold by lack of human warmth and by absence of human comforts. Call us all, Lord—even as our hearts are warmed by the reality of your presence in the world, to seek to be your arms in action to show love and justice to ones in need. Amen.*

**By Sharon Baglyos, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service**



SAMPLE MESSAGES FOR INSPIRATION

Feel free to mix and match some of the phrases below or write your own.  
Google Translate or a Spanish-speaking friend can help too!

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Dear friend,	↔	Querido amigo,
Greetings from [city/state]	↔	Saludo desde [city/state]
Please know that you are not alone or forgotten.	↔	Quiero que sepa que no está solo, ni olvidado.
I am praying for your protection and safety during this challenging time.	↔	Estoy orando para su protección y seguridad durante estos momentos difíciles.
I stand in solidarity with you.	↔	Me solidarizo con usted.
Please know that thousands of people are working to keep you and your family safe.	↔	Miles de personas están trabajando para que usted y su familia esten protegidos.
May God bless you.	↔	Que Dios los bendiga.

*Image above of Honduran villagers who reported environmental degradation and extreme poverty, due to trade policies that displaced their indigenous community. Photo: Sharon Stanley-Rea)*



## Impacts of “Migrant Protection Protocols”

*After finding The Light, they “left for their own country by another road.” Matthew 2:12*

**Reflection:** In his 2019 homily, Pope Francis reminds us that the Star was the brightest of all stars. Yet, only the Magi saw the great light. After standing directly beneath the star and allowing themselves to be bathed in the light of Jesus, the Magi altered their course. They rejected the darkness of a human King. Their encounter with Jesus led them to the road taken by Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. Like the Magi, they all journeyed to a place unexpected and sacrificed their plans in order to usher forth the Light of God. They saw light that overcame darkness—but had to be open to it. We, too, are called to alter our course of “me, me, me” and “my needs” and take the path illumined by the Magi’s example- that of compassion, justice and concern for all of God’s children.



From LAWG MPP Infographic. (See link below.)

**Story:** Alejandra is a 28 year old mother of two who has lived a life of fear and violence in Honduras. She is one of nearly 60,000 asylum seekers who have been placed in the Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as the Remain in Mexico policy. Alejandra prayed for an end to her dark journey and for a compassionate judge who would provide justice to her. She did not know that judges never go to the tent courts. Alejandra was ordered find her way to the international bridge of Nueva Laredo, Mexico, in the dead of night.

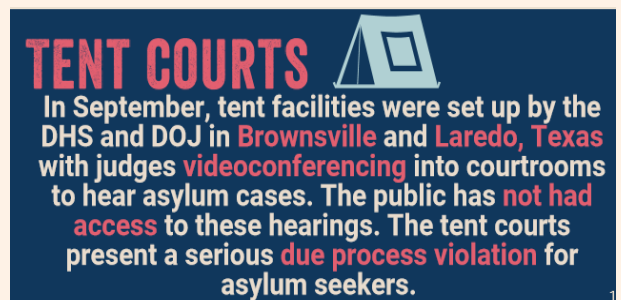
At 4:30 a.m., she, her kids, and about 50 others, were taken to a tent in Laredo, Texas. Here, at the tent court, they each had a brief encounter with a judge who appeared via video. Like most seekers at the tent courts, Alejandra had no chance to meet with a lawyer. After her brief video hearing, she was sent back to Mexico to wait. The numerous asylum seekers who failed to make it to the bridge by 4:30 a.m. were simply deported in absentia, their claims dismissed. Alejandra had hoped for the Light of Truth. Instead she experienced a scene similar to when Dorothy first meets the Wizard, and was not offered justice.

### Actions:

- Write your Congressperson and tell them that MPP violates human rights and represents to the world that USA is not courageous and compassionate, but selfish and greedy. We are better than this. You may send a message [here](#).
- Write a Letter to the Editor explaining the MPP process and how that runs counter to your faith values. Share stats about MPP through [this helpful infographic](#) from the Latin American Working Group. Images on this page are also from this source.
- Learn more about damages to migrants caused by “Safe Third Country” Agreements in the articles [here](#) and [here](#).
- Ask a church leader to highlight from the pulpit regarding the dangers of “Safe Third Country” agreements and “Tent Courts.”
- Pray with your family every night for those who are not seated at a table, eating food and sleeping indoors.

**Prayer:** *Precious Lord, illumine our vision so we might find your path. The light of justice and truth seems to shine only for a few. Human demagogues want those who are enlightened to return to darkness. Dear Lord, give us the courage to remain in your Light when darkness pulls us away from You. Grant us the wisdom to sacrifice our plans and change course as needed so that your plan for justice will be made manifest. Give us hearts on fire to joyfully usher forth your light of compassion and justice to all the pilgrims who present at our borders. Amen.*

**By Sister Mary Ellen Lacy, Daughters of Charity**



From LAWG MPP Infographic. (See link above.)



## Participate NOW in a “FACES AND LACES” Vigil

Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries and  
Ministries Across Generations Team—Justice for Children Ministries  
Invites you to Help Sponsor A Local #Faith4Asylum Vigil

Go here: <https://faith4asylum.com/join-the-campaign-2/> and click on “Resources” to download sample vigils and prayers.

Sharing love for asylum seekers, remembering families who are suffering, and showing commitment to end harmful policies, we invite you to join more than 21 border shelters who are asking faith communities to lift up the imagery of shoelaces to raise awareness of dangers faced by asylum seekers forced to return to Mexico to await court consideration of their legal request for asylum in the United States. Will you please join us in “shoelace prayers”?

At your faith community’s regular Sunday worship service *or* at a special prayer vigil, we ask you to invite people to bring shoelaces to worship. These laces can then be joined together to carry and place around your worship area as a visual prayer symbol. Also, we invite children to cut out and color in the pictures of laceless shoes found in Appendix A . These pictures can be strung on each shoelace before they are tied together. Faces or stories of migrant children can also be drawn on the reverse side of the cutout shoes, or tied to the laces. Copy Appendix B to show places on our border where migrants are suffering and being returned.

Seven shoelaces tied together can represent the 7 US southern border sectors where asylum seekers are being returned. (See the map and sector names in Appendix B) The name of each sector can be written on each shoe.

- If you can join 60 shoelaces together they can represent the 60,000 asylum seekers returned in the first year of the “Remain in Mexico” policies.

### WHY CHOOSE SHOELACES AS A SYMBOL?

Currently, when asylum seekers are apprehended, their shoelaces are removed; and when returned to Mexico to await their asylum consideration court date they are easily identified as vulnerable and made victims of cartel violence, human trafficking and extortion at alarming rates. Women and children are especially vulnerable. Some detainees have taken their own lives. Others have died for lack of medical care. Children are traumatized daily.



*Worshippers at Foothills Christian Church in Glendale, AZ recently joined 56 shoelaces to represent 56,000 migrants returned under MPP, and spread the laces around their sanctuary (left.).*



*Rev. Bekah Krevens, Foothills Christian Church Pastor*

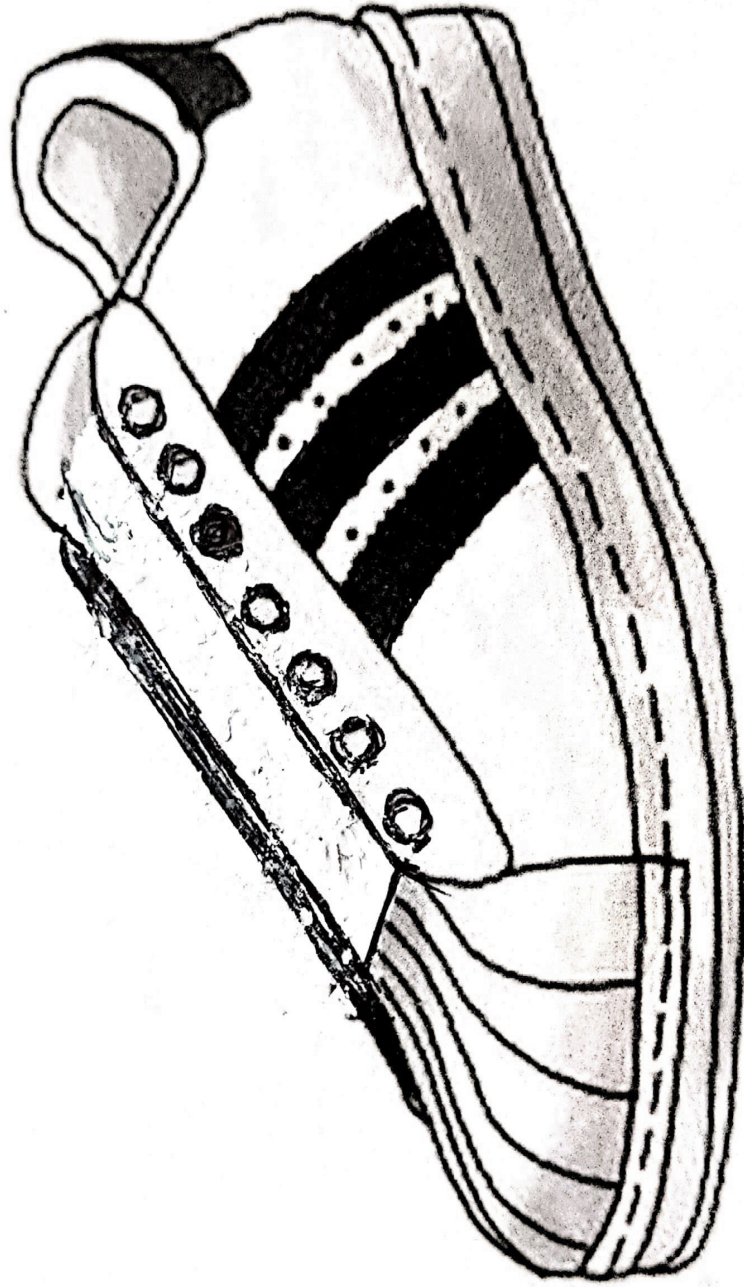
**THIS DETENTION IS ENTIRELY UNNECESSARY.** According to Syracuse University’s [Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse](#), 99% of asylum-seekers attended all of their court hearings in 2019. Forcing asylum-seekers to remain homeless in Mexico until their cases are heard in the U.S. is just the tip of this iceberg of harm to migrants. Taking children from parents and caregivers at the border, unsanitary and inhumane detention conditions in the US, and returns of migrants to dangerous conditions are resulting in untold physical and emotional abuse.

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APPENDIX A

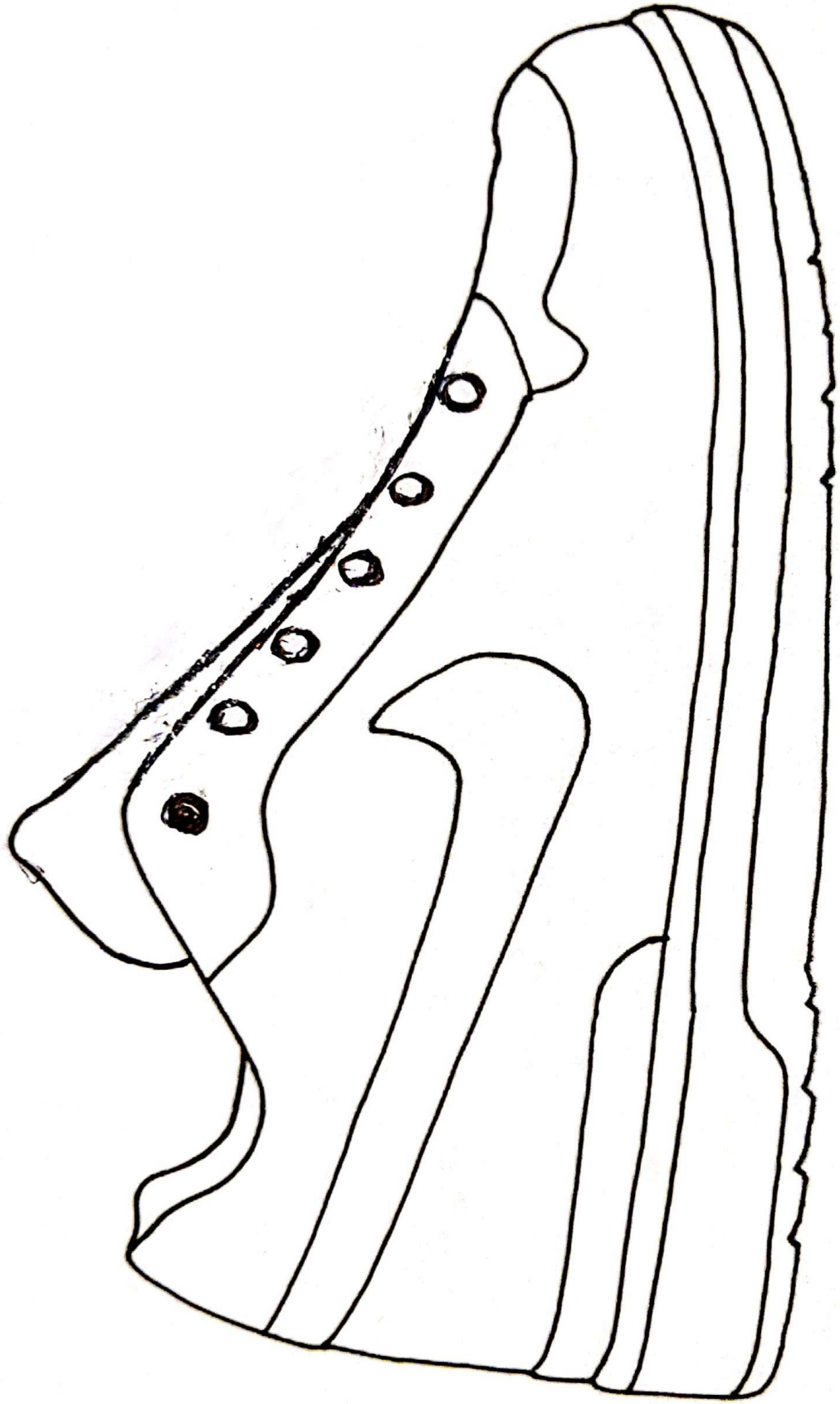






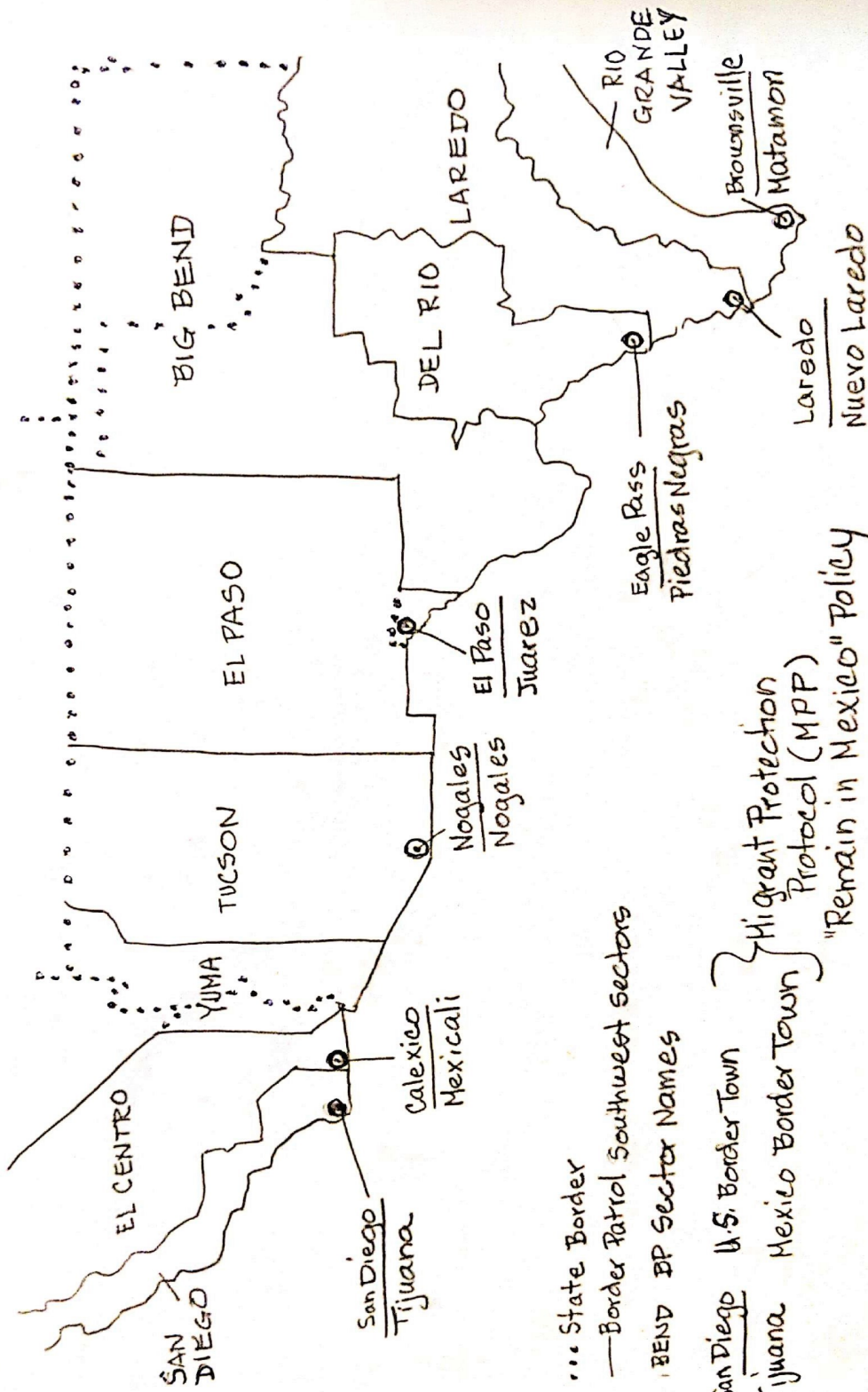
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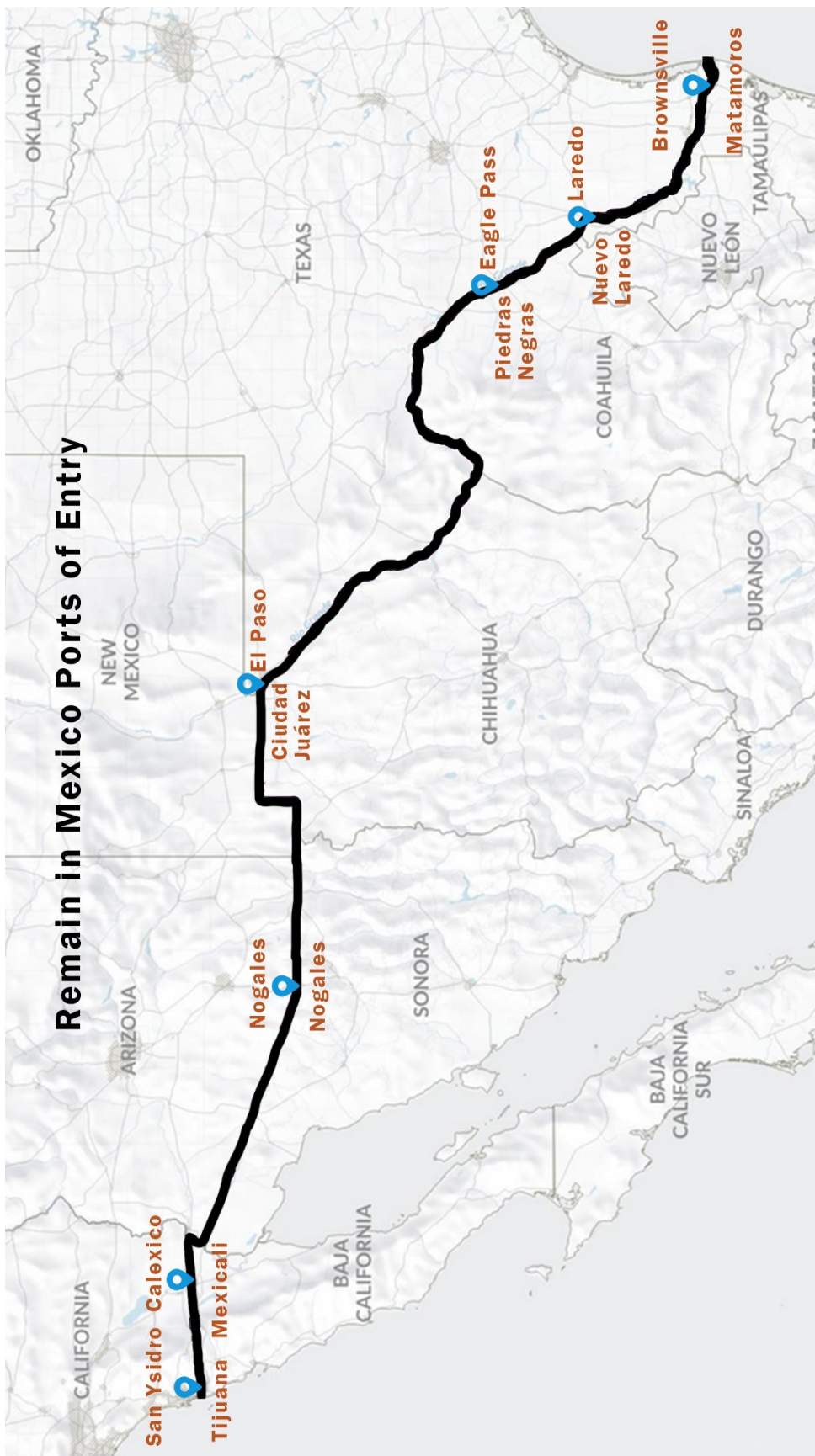


# APPENDIX B

SOUTHWEST BORDER PATROL SECTORS  
 Main Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) Cities  
 (or Remain in Mexico' Cities)



## APPENDIX C



Southwest Border Points of Entry Map by Human Rights First, showing all 7 Southwest Border Patrol Sectors implementing MPP as of January, 2020.