

COURTS & PORTS

Faithful Witness on the Texas-Mexico Border



The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy/Texas Impact invites you to participate in Courts & Ports: Faithful Witness on the Texas-Mexico Border. This 2-day immersion experience engages people of faith to witness first-hand the legal and law enforcement processes related to immigration, detention, and deportation occurring in South Texas.

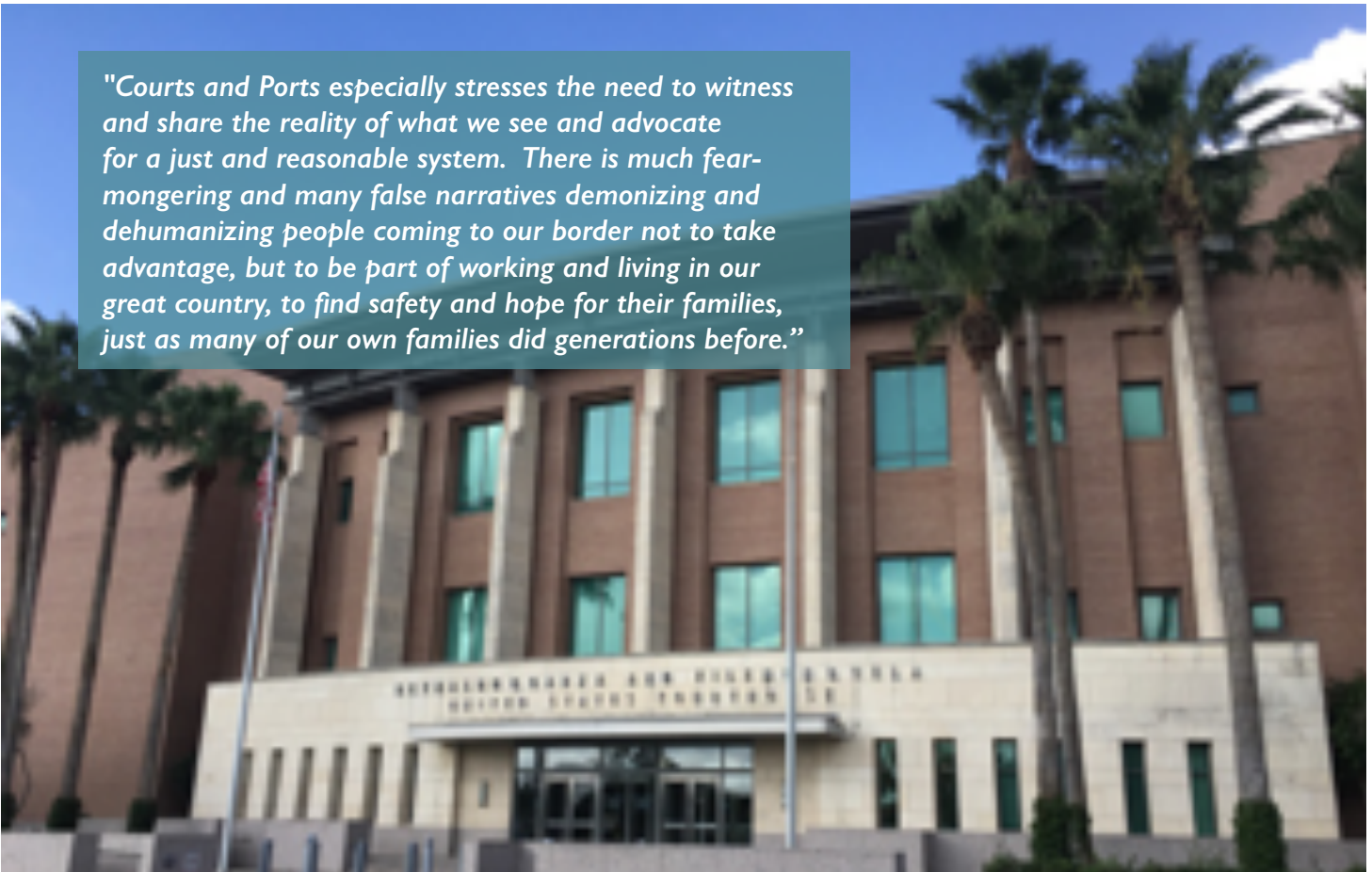
Participants observe proceedings in federal criminal court, and record their observations for use by immigration attorneys. Participants also meet with faith and policy experts working on the border, and spend time with individuals who have pending asylum cases; engage in contextualizing discussion with Texas Impact pastoral staff and other faith leaders; plan and participate in worship; and become part of an online “alumni” community.

Auto Declaración
Vehículos Ligeros
Cars and Light Vehicles
Auto Statement

BIENVENIDOS A MEXICO

Declaración de mercancías
Punto de revisión
Baños
No armas
Información
Imp. Temp. De vehículos
Mas de 10,000 u.s.d. Declare

"Courts and Ports especially stresses the need to witness and share the reality of what we see and advocate for a just and reasonable system. There is much fear-mongering and many false narratives demonizing and dehumanizing people coming to our border not to take advantage, but to be part of working and living in our great country, to find safety and hope for their families, just as many of our own families did generations before."



The Need

With the advent of the Administration's "zero-tolerance" policy, federal criminal courts on the southern border of the U.S. are overwhelmed with cases involving citizens of other countries crossing the border from Mexico into the U.S. in a location other than an official port of entry. This unauthorized entry constitutes a misdemeanor offense similar to trespass. Many of the individuals who come across the border in this fashion plan to make an asylum claim, and in the past, border law enforcement often have not pressed charges related to the misdemeanor offense since the defendant ultimately will end up in immigration court. Under zero-tolerance however, all such misdemeanors must be prosecuted in criminal court, where all U.S. due process requirements apply.

Attorneys practicing in the federal criminal courts in Texas stress that court observers are needed to identify and document due process weaknesses and violations. The presence of observers in the court may strengthen an asylum seeker's resolve to plead not guilty, and may empower a judge to request modifications in process. Additionally, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been reported blocking legal ports of entry, intimidating asylum seekers and forcing them to cross illegally. Human migration experts believe the need for court observers will continue for some time to come.



What to Expect



- Observe first-hand the operation of the U.S. immigration system and current policies related to border security
- Interact directly with individuals who are seeking asylum in the U.S. Participate in theological and policy discussions with grassroots and faith leaders
- Practice storytelling and communication with skilled trainers so they can share their experiences effectively with their home communities
- Become part of a facilitated online “Courts and Ports Alumni” community that will work to change the nature of the immigration debate in local congregations and neighborhoods

Program Costs

\$300 covers double occupancy room for 3 nights at Brownsville Holiday Inn Express, group meals, and program costs. Participants should plan to purchase one lunch and one dinner. Single occupancy rooms are available at an additional cost. Participants are responsible for their own travel arrangements and travel costs to and from Brownsville, Texas.



"On one trip, typical of others, we sat in the Brownsville courthouse and watched as 55 migrants—wrists and ankles bound with metal cuffs—were arraigned, tried, convicted, and sentenced to deportation in the span of two hours. Almost no one spoke English; the the migrants had less than five minutes each with the public defender; and no one had a real chance to state their case or explain what they were doing there. It bore no resemblance to the justice system Americans think they know."

COMMENTARY JAN 17

To find immigration solutions, more Americans should spend time at the border

Andy Lewis and Bee Moorhead

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Basics

- **Courts & Ports is intended for groups of no more than eight and no fewer than two.**
- **Participants can all be from the same congregation, or Texas Impact can match up participants up to a maximum of eight per trip.**
- **Each trip will last two full days. Participants will arrive the night before the first day, and leave either the night of the second day, or the following morning. Participants are expected to attend the entire trip.**
- **Courts & Ports is open to individuals 18 years of age and up.**
- **All participants must have a valid government-issued form of identification such as a driver's license or passport. To participate in international bridge crossings (an important part of Courts & Ports), participants must have a valid U.S. passport.**
- **All participants will be required to sign a covenant agreement stating that they understand Courts & Ports rules, and that they will bear witness in their home community to their experiences in Courts & Ports.**

"It is important that you understand that there is no one individual, or group of individuals, we can blame for what is happening at the border. Not one "side" is right or wrong. There is a lot of confusion and grey space in what is happening along the border – which makes it more complicated to share with you the truths about what is actually happening."

Mary Lu Hare