NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Deportee ministers to migrants with grace, humility

Vicki Kline | Sep. 12, 2011
Immigration and the Church

Adan Magdariaga cuts the hair of the owner of Transportes Fronterizos de Sonora. (Photo by Vicki Kline)

COMMENTARY

NOGALES, Mexico -- On a recent Sunday morning, roughly 30 people squeezed into the Nogales living room of Adan Magdariaga. All were present for the house church service intended to bring together regular worshippers, recently arrived migrants, and humanitarian aid workers with whom Magdariaga has become friends.

Magdariaga was deported from the U.S. in January, following two years of detention in the Eloy Immigration Detention Center, a private prison-like facility run by the Corrections Corporation of America. He had been presented with the option of staying in that facility to continue fighting his immigration removal case, or to accept a deportation and work on the case from Mexico.

His decision found him returning to Mexico, a homeland he had not known since 1975, when he migrated to the United States as a teenager. Upon leaving the detention facility, he carried nothing but a few dollars in his pocket and the clear, plastic bag that held his belongings.

Like so many people in Nogales, Magdariaga has a lot on his plate by which he could become overburdened and insular. He was a legal permanent resident in the U.S. for more than 30 years. In the 1980?s he became swept up in the music scene, working as a singer, and becoming involved in drugs and alcohol.

In the early 1990?s, he found himself in prison for a drug-related charge. There, he experienced a deep conversion to Christianity and began concentrating on becoming a minister, restoring his relationships with family, and contributing to his community. He served in the U.S. Army during the first Gulf War, and continues to demonstrate his loyalty to the values he learned during his military service.

Magdariaga was deported for a crime for which he had long-since served his sentence. He is separated from his

family in a land that is no longer familiar to him. Having dedicated himself to Christianity and service to others many years ago, Magdariaga viewed his deportation as an opportunity to build a new community in Nogales and find avenues through which he could serve his fellow travelers.

Magdariaga is one of many people who face the need to remain in Nogales while they struggle with legal cases, find work, or attempt to remain in a place that is not quite so far from their families.

The face of migration in the borderlands has changed significantly in the last few years. Rather than the majority of people being those traveling to the U.S. for the first time, most have lived in the U.S. for extended periods of time and have been deported as a result of increased immigration enforcement methods throughout the country.

According to a statistic recently released in the Associated Press, nearly 1 million people have been deported since the Obama administration took office. Nearly all have established lives and have family in the U.S., heightening their sense of displacement upon deportation -- and their desperation to find solutions that will allow them to reunite with family.

For some, however, their time in Nogales is not only a period of separation and desperation, but also a time in which they engage in service to others. Migrants are commonly found among those who serve in migrant soup kitchens, shelters, and service centers.

Magdariaga believes firmly that in his short time in Nogales, ?God has allowed for all of this to happen; He has put good people in my path. He has allowed me to serve others.?

The borderlands are often depicted as a place of violence, greed and exploitation. In so many ways, this is true, and people are at great risk during their time in transit. Yet in the midst of tragedy and pain, there is also kindness and hospitality in unsuspecting places, and from unsuspecting people.

Despite having nothing upon his arrival to Nogales, Magdariaga connected with a man with whom he was detained in Eloy and was able to stay with him until he found a place of his own.

Magdariaga began building relationships little by little. He encountered humanitarian aid workers who showed him kindness and offered concrete assistance. They introduced him to the owner of *Transportes Fronterizos de Sonora*, a privately owned bus company that provides discounted transportation for migrants to return to their place of origin.

Magdariaga informed the owner of the bus station that he is a trained barber, and began providing haircuts to migrants who pass through the bus station. He works only for tips, or provides free cuts to people who need them but have no money to pay.

Once Magdariaga and another migrant friend found a place to live, they began offering the little they had to others. They have housed many migrants in their humble home, many of whom have used up the number of days they can stay in the temporary migrant shelters in Nogales.

On a typical afternoon, Magdariaga can be found cutting hair, offering a listening ear to other desperate travelers, and providing guidance to people who may need extra support. A singer in a former life, he often leads sing-a-longs with groups of migrants, or performs comedy for groups of waiting migrants in the hopes of lifting spirits. This summer, he taught physical education at a summer school program in Nogales.

Despite the many obstacles confronting him, Magdariaga demonstrates an uncommon level of grace and humility, offering his life as an example of service and compassion toward others.

[Vicki Kline, a Catholic Worker and professional social worker, is currently exploring the intersection between vocation and career in the borderlands. She can be reached at victoria.kline@hotmail.com.]

Source URL (retrieved on *11/24/2014 - 14:41*): http://ncronline.org/news/deportee-ministers-migrants-grace-humility?splash=