**THANKS TO ALL**

**Bob Coons of Emmanuel Lutheran and I have been regularly visiting Mesa Verde for over two years. We have witnessed heart-breaking situations. I am thinking of Elmer’s mother crying as she was going through the x-ray screening door. As she was carrying one of Elmer’s young nephews. Her last moments with Elmer before he was deported to Guatemala. Of Jose with his wrist in a “wrist sleeve” because of the actions of ICE agents. Of him telling the ICE officers, “God is watching.” Jose was later in solitary confinement because of chicken pox—contracted in Mesa Verde. Jose left his wife and young children (including a baby a few months old) without a means of financial support when he was deported to Mexico.**

**This visiting is not “fun.” It IS visiting men and women paid in a private for-profit prison which does not even provide GED or ESL classes--which are available in California State prisons. It IS visiting men and women separated from and longing for their families. It IS visiting men and women who often feel trapped and hopeless—with feelings of isolation, abandonment, and desperation (sometimes leading to their voluntary agreement to be deported). That is what happened to Elmer. He became suicidal and was placed in solitary confinement. He signed legal forms permitting deportation—which he regretted as soon as the effects of “medication” which had been given him wore off.**

**Our reward as visitors: connection—even in these difficult circumstances.**

**Juan understands. Juan De La Torre (23 and graduating soon from CSUB) provided a beautiful summary from his visit with Presentation (61 years old) last Sunday. He wrote, “In an effort to deepen our connection, a few weeks ago I started to ask him for advice. He is three times my age and I genuinely believe he has grown and developed a strong and willing mind given the many hardships he has lived through. I received wonderful advice. One thing remains among all of the people I have visited at Mesa Verde. You must believe in something.” And, “I hope to keep making connections. Placing politics aside, I believe it’s important to build relationships based from compassion. Regardless of the ‘wrongs’ another person has done.”**

**Yes. Connection based upon compassion.**

**Juan was also instrumental in arranging a visit several weeks ago by Margarito’s nephew, his wife and their daughter. Margarito is blind. He had not been in contact with this nephew for 18 years.**

**That same Sunday a few week ago Presentation’s two nieces (one from Los Angeles and another from San Diego) visited Presentation. They had not been in contact for seven years and were not sure if he was alive or dead. Carlos (a former detainee) reached out to these nieces to arrange for this reunion.**

**So many other examples to be thankful for…**

**---Last Sunday Harriet wore a Rosary which Mario had made and mailed to her. She had visited him twice before last Sunday. However, their one-hour visits had greatly impacted Mario. He was grateful for those two hours of connection. Harriet wrote, “It was so sweet from this guy in a red suit and all tatted up.”**

**---The post cards from Ray (deported to Tonga) to Megan inviting her to visit (she fully plans to go). She had visited Ray—providing him encouragement as his case progressed (some 20 years ago he was sentenced to prison for life).**

**---The openness of Rahim to Megan and Lance—including about his extreme abuse as a child--including solitary confinement for 17 months when he was 13 years old. The facility he was in has since been closed. Rahim’s sharing about his current threat of deportation to Afghanistan. Rahim was brought to the United States when he was nine years old and has not been back to Afghanistan in the 30+ years since.**

**---Belinda’s faithful visits to Odvin and write-ups about the visits (“he was very happy to have a visitor”). She is sending him books in Spanish.**

**---Alexandra’s visit last Saturday to Sofia. Sofia (from Lamont) was on her was to work. The driver of the car she was in was stopped and ICE agents ordered those in the vehicle to exit the vehicle and show documentation. Sofia did. ICE deliberately wrote down a false name and stated that she had given a fake name. Sofia is afraid of deportation, but partakes in praying the Rosary with others and goes for walks to help fight depression. Sofia buried her son the day before she was arrested by ICE.**

**---Alex and Juan’s on-going visits to Margarito. Continuity of concern.**

**---Carlos, Mendez and Victor for their “para-legal” (truly) work in Dorms D (Carlos and Mendez) and Victor (Dorm C) inside Mesa Verde. Tedious work requiring tremendous dedication. Saving detainees from almost certain deportation. Volunteering their time INSIDE Mesa Verde.**

**---Kevin and Belinda and Megan’s visits to Oscar. Oscar is 21 years old. He fled El Salvador and made his way to the United States when he was 10 years old. This after his grandmother (who was caring for him) died. After she died he experienced beatings from his father resulting in his bloody shirts sticking to his back. Kevin and Belinda and Megan—this young man needed (and continues to need) your time and compassion.**

**One of my rewards: a hat knitted by Armando with Matthew 25:36 as a “heading.” Matthew 25:36 reads, “I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.”**

**This gift from someone detained in Mesa Verde—in Armando’s case for over two years. Receiving instead of giving gifts from someone incarcerated? In different ways that is what transpires during each visit.**

**Bob and I are honored to visit Armando and other detainees (we leave feeling “as if we have been to church”). Thank you for our neighbors at Mesa Verde for connecting with us.**

**And, our deepest appreciation to each of the volunteers who so faithfully visit our detained neighbors in Mesa Verde. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. For sharing your time and your compassion Sunday after Sunday.**

**Eddy Laine**

**KWESI (Kern Welcoming and Extending Solidarity to Immigrants)**

**November 2, 2019**