We spent one day hiking to three shrines in the Sonoran desert and leaving water and food along the trail in an effort to prevent the creation of future shrines. We were walking along the side of a hill when Bob stepped off the trail to work his way up through the spiny ocotillo. After a few minutes he saw a cross and a small pile of rocks. He took some rope out of his pack, knelt down, and lashed the cross solidly together. Bob had found the remains of a migrant there in March of last year. We sat down in the scant shade of a mesquite tree and contemplated the tragedy that had occurred at that site.

Bob and Dorothy had hung four packs beside the trail the week before. They had checked the packs, and the water and food they had placed inside was all gone. We unloaded the water and food packets we had carried and restocked those packs. It felt like an appropriate way to honor the person who had died just down the trail.

After hiking a while Bob led us to a tree which has a cross and a candle at its base. That marks the site where he found the remains of a migrant in February of this year. We again sat in the shade for a long moment of silence. A short distance away, Bob brought us to the third shrine. He found the remains of another migrant there on that same day in March 2011.

I asked Bob a few questions about the shrines and I started to feel overwhelmed — sadness and anger. I took a few steps away and tried to focus on the mesquite trees and the feel of the breeze on my face. The cactus behind the cross was in bloom — beauty and tragedy, side by side. “I don’t want to have to place another shrine in the desert,” Bob told me. “It hurts to do so but I don’t want people to be forgotten.” Let us pray in love and solidarity, with our partners near and across the border.

Scott Nicholson, a Global Ministries long term volunteer, serves with BorderLinks in Nogales, Mexico.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Matthew 5:6