

A Run for the Border
St. Thomas More Newman Center
Alternative Spring Break 2006
By Jennifer Wideman

As a group of 10 excited spring breakers, the El Paso Alternative Spring Break trip set out for the border not knowing what to expect. We didn't know where we would sleep, what we would eat, or what we were going to be doing. We had little to no comprehension of the problems concerning the border. We had a lot to learn.

Throughout our week at the border, we had the opportunity to talk with volunteers at hospitality houses for the undocumented, an immigration lawyer who gave up a very high-paying job to work with those in need, a labor organizer who fights for the rights of the factory workers, a border patrol officer who was himself an immigrant, and many undocumented persons with extraordinary stories. It is quite amazing the degree of difference between reading about a person's struggle and being told in person about someone's journey. This spring break was an awakening experience for all of us.

I can honestly say that before we left, I knew little to nothing about the border culture, and I am not sure that I particularly cared. I wasn't aware of the intensely strict laws governing immigration, or of the terrible working conditions of the factories along the border. We met people that have left a mark on us, who have changed us for life. Now when we think of the border or of the immigration struggles we witness on the news, we see the faces of those we befriended. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This love should be extended to our neighbors to the south. As we all know, Jesus said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me." This break put us face-to-face with some of the least of His people, and now we are driven to spread awareness about the border; we want to educate our

fellow Catholics so they too can understand the struggles of the undocumented. Most importantly of all, this trip put a face to the seemingly vague problem of immigration. What we have learned from our experience we will never forget: every human being has value, and that value is equal no matter on what side of the border they reside.