
On the road to Cuba 25th Pastors for Peace Caravan

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Since 1992 the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization/Pastors for Peace Friendshipment caravan has challenged the U.S. blockade of Cuba, casting a solidarity net to every corner of the United States and into Canada and Mexico. On July 23, caravanistas marched across the border to join their brightly painted vehicles. Without U.S. government permission or an export license, the 25th caravan successfully crossed the U.S.-Mexico border headed to Cuba.

Activists accompanied tons of humanitarian aid. They will see Cuba for themselves by asserting their right to travel and freely associating with the Cuban people. It is awesome.

The Friendshipment Caravan to Cuba is not doing what the old auto advertising jingle urged when it exhorted car buyers to "See the USA in your Chevrolet." It's no individualist escape. Caravanistas band together for a common purpose: They collect computers, medicine, medical supplies, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, tools, building supplies and diesel buses for Cuba.

Their trucks and cars roll through Canada and along many similar routes throughout the United States. Every day they stop at a different city to hold a different meeting, discussion, press conference. This year all the routes converged in McAllen, Texas. At a church there, participants spent a few days sorting, packing and listing the humanitarian materials in manifests. This common work and the collective preparation of meals brought the group closer together.

The oldest caravanista was 74; the youngest, her grandson of 12. International participants came from Mexico, Germany, Denmark and Brazil.

My route began July 14 from Detroit. By the time we reached McAllen on July 19, we had made new friends who hosted the caravan in Indianapolis; Memphis, Tenn.; Dallas and Austin, Texas. Every city's welcome was different and special: a lunchtime meet-and-greet; a meeting with young student and worker organizers who were also

planning a demonstration to stop U.S. aid to Israel and the genocidal bombing of Gaza; an event at a Pan-African cultural center with a DJ, African dancing, singers, drumming and a skype discussion with a graduate of Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine, now a resident doctor in Tucson, Ariz.; and a house meeting with a delicious curry dinner.

We were welcomed into homes for the night where discussion continued about Cuba, the case of the Cuban 5 and the struggle to free Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino and Antonio Guerrero who remain in U.S. prisons.

We didn't know what we would find in McAllen, just across the U.S. border from Reynosa, Mexico. Migrant children fleeing the hardships and violence created by U.S. foreign policy, coups and intervention in their Central American homelands were landing in McAllen from the other side. Our car arrived just a little too late to join a demonstration supporting the migrants — but other caravanistas were there.

The night before the border crossing we joined local activists at a McAllen federal building protesting the Israeli genocidal bombing of Gaza.

In a special evening exchange, a panel of local activists from both sides of the border and as far away as Houston discussed with caravanistas the many struggles in the Rio Grande Valley. Caravan organizer Ana Maria Cardenas met women workers who were on strike at the Reynosa maquiladora factory. They were demanding the wages they had lost when auto parts production ownership was sold to Visteon by Johnson Controls, both well-known U.S. corporations.
