A Border Immersion Program (BIP) is a unique opportunity to learn, serve and be served. The readings given are intended to help facilitate your group's education and pre-arrival planning. They were chosen to give you a brief introduction to some of the major issues here on the border, and exposure to larger international and global issues that manifest themselves here on the U.S./Mexico border.

In our experience, groups that have engaged in healthy and meaningful exploration prior to their arrival are better prepared to understand what they see and feel here on the border. If and when your group is able to meet up prior to your trip, we suggest that at least one person write down the main points of discussion and any conclusions drawn by the group. We also suggest each participant writes down some individual questions or thoughts in the weeks leading up to the trip. That way they can ask or share their ideas during the BIP. Each participant should bring a journal during his or her week on the border. It is interesting to compare entries from before, during and after the trip.

Before your arrival it is important to understand the long history of cultural diversity and exchange that has shaped El Paso. Many Latinos here along the border are not immigrants; their families have lived in this region for generations, long before the U.S. claimed the territory from Mexico. The area has been home to Native American indigenous, people of Spanish and Mexican descent, and mestizos for hundreds of years.

Also, the nature of the border has changed significantly in recent years. El Paso and Ciudad Juárez have long been one community, with much travel between the two "separate" cities by people visiting family and friends, shopping, attending church and school, and conducting business. People lived in El Paso and worked in Juárez; people lived in Juárez and worked in El Paso.

In the last 10 years, things have changed dramatically. Growing anti-immigrant sentiment across the U.S. has been the catalyst for operations such as "Operation Hold the Line," started in 1993, which have adversely affected local economies and made cross-border living more difficult for people on both sides of the border. This is especially true since 9/11/01, as government expenditures continue to increase in efforts to further fortify the border, while demand for new Border Patrol agents is exceeding the supply.

Each one of us is called to be a servant and to minister to one another in a spirit of love, as brothers and sisters, and as Americans and Mexicans, bound by a common faith. We at Cristo Rey are delighted to share in this journey with your group as we seek the meaning of this call in our lives as individuals, as members of churches, as students, as U.S. citizens and as concerned members of a human race in this increasingly shrinking world.