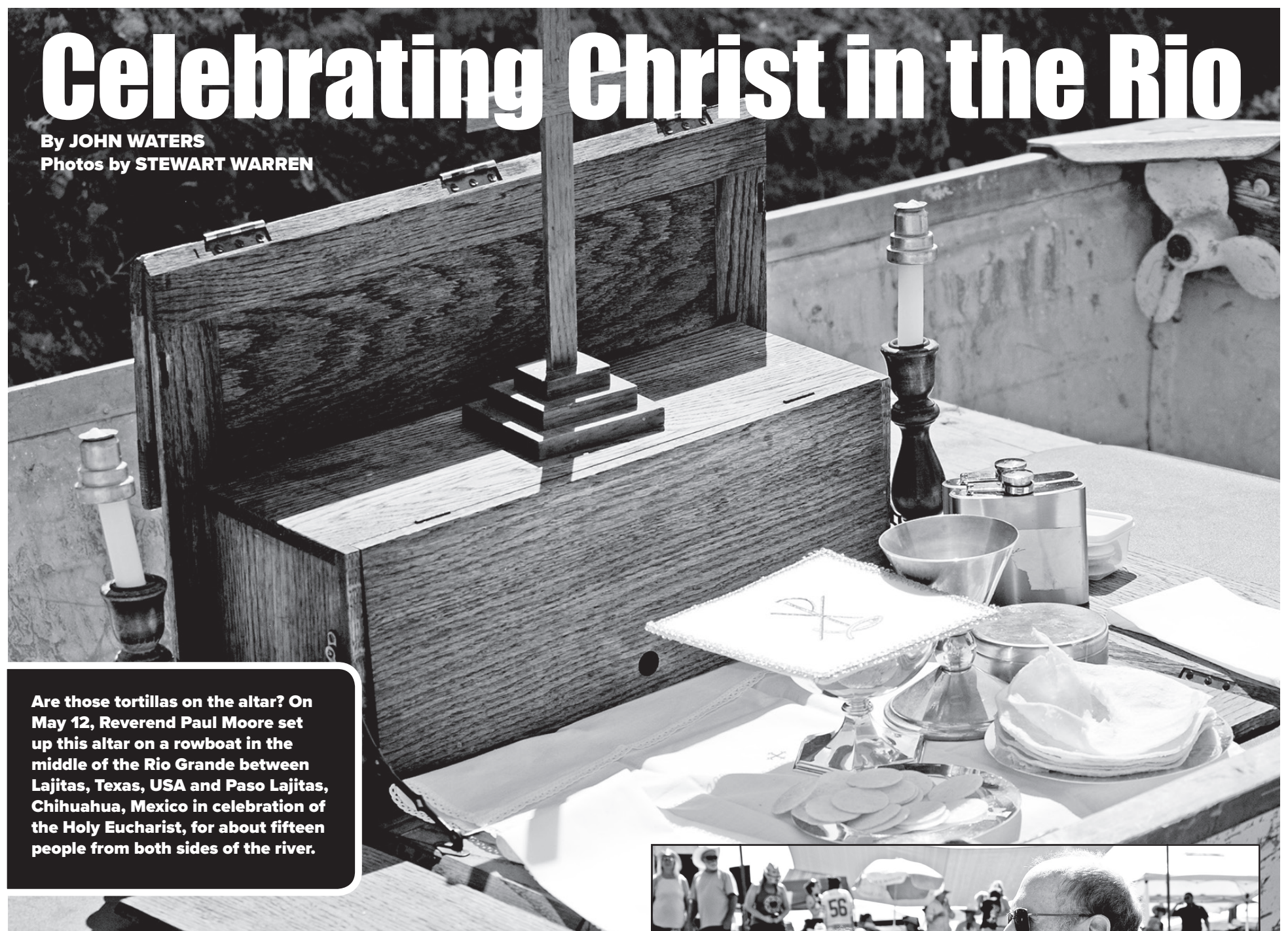


# Celebrating Christ in the Rio

By JOHN WATERS

Photos by STEWART WARREN



**Are those tortillas on the altar? On May 12, Reverend Paul Moore set up this altar on a rowboat in the middle of the Rio Grande between Lajitas, Texas, USA and Paso Lajitas, Chihuahua, Mexico in celebration of the Holy Eucharist, for about fifteen people from both sides of the river.**

On a warm May morning in the middle of the Rio Grande—or Rio Bravo, as it is known in Mexico—the Reverend Paul Moore, an Episcopal priest from Church of the Good Shepherd in Silver City, New Mexico celebrated Holy Eucharist waist-deep in the waters flowing between the two nations, as part of the annual Voices From Both Sides/Voces de Ambos Lados celebration.

The Voices fiesta celebrates the communal thread shared by the communities of Lajitas in Texas and Paso Lajitas located less than a mile away in Mexico. Beginning in 2013 the annual Voices celebration has brought hundreds residents from both nations to celebrate in and along the Rio Grande.

The border between the U.S. and Mexico is somewhere in the center of the ever-shifting river. Moore, who is chair of the Rio Grande Borderland Ministries of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, is passionate that borders are political and not spiritual concepts.

Christian cosmology is replete with references to water. Jesus began his ministry

in the River Jordan, he was baptized in water, and is said to have walked on water and turned water into wine. Celebrating in the middle of the Rio Grande is a natural fit.

To Moore, “Christ came to redeem and reconcile, not to divide us” and said he thought of the Martin Luther King, Jr. quote, “The church must be reminded it is not the master or servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool.”

“Political beliefs have political implications, and one of the political implications here is you can divide us politically, but you cannot divide us spiritually,” said Moore. And so it was on the morning of May 12 when Moore consecrated bread and wine and about 15 people from both north and south of the river partook in the Holy Eucharist in the middle of the river.

Using a small rowboat, Moore set up an altar for the service. Given that the border is designated as the deepest part of the channel, and rivers, by nature, are everchanging, it is unknown if the altar was in the U.S. or Mexico, or a little of both.



**On May 12, Reverend Sara Gluck and Reverend Paul Moore from the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Silver City, New Mexico celebrated Holy Eucharist midstream in the Rio Grande between Lajitas and Paso Lajitas.**

“From Panama to Canada people eat tortillas.” said Moore who chose tortillas during the communion ceremony, rather than the standard communion wafers. “Tortillas are a symbol of the unity of people across North America.”

When asked if there were any baptisms performed during the Voices and Eucharist celebrations, Moore gleefully responded, “I wish!” Maybe next year?

*For essay by Paul Moore, please see page 6.*