



2023 Year in Review



Angel Lopez - Mexico

The euphoria of crossing into the United States is the most incredible and painful experience that I see every time I am at the border. I'm wondering if all migrants who once entered the USA had these emotions—an overwhelming joy to finally arrive on American soil and a desire to leave at the same time because it is nothing like they imagine. Could freedom and loneliness exist at the same time and place? 2023 at the border took us to our low and high at the same time, as we saw people crying for home and in despair. We only hope 2024 brings a better outcome and a less stressful reality for those waiting at the border.

- In 2023 we had the opportunity to take five groups to the border. The experience of going from Michigan to Ciudad Juarez is one that many in our groups will never forget. Some of them were able to answer some questions and doubts, although other questions gave birth to other questions, deeper and more complicated.
- We are thankful that many of our letters for prayers and support were answered positively and almost half of our needs have been covered. Praise the Lord for such confirmation of our ministry.
- Pastor Samuel visited us at the end of the year. He came by himself because of the lack of visas for his entire family. We hope one day his family will join him to visit us. He came to visit churches in Michigan and former migrants who now have a new life in Chicago.





Waiting at the border once more

A birthday at the border

For the people on the move, perhaps one of the struggles of the soul is connected to those important dates in life, like birthdays and anniversaries. There is a strong desire to be with their loved ones and enjoy a cake or just eat together on that day. On one trip in 2023, we had the opportunity to connect with many young people. One of them was Luis (not his real name). After many months of traveling from one border to another, he finally reached his dream: to cross legally into the United States. Without money and a cell phone—which was taken by one of his captors in Mexico—he was not able to receive or send any messages to his family. Our learning group was visiting Sacred Heart Church in El Paso when we met Luis. Luis was sitting under the shadow of a small tree. He looked lost in his thoughts. We began to ask about his trip and his family and, almost at the end of our conversation, we asked him when exactly he left his country, and so on. He asked us... what date is today? We answered and, like waking up from a dream, he realized today was his birthday. Our American friends understood this feeling. We went and bought Mexican bread and a small birthday candle. In the street, we sang to Luis. This, perhaps, was the most memorable birthday. There were words of encouragement, there was a song, people together—there was hope in all of us for a moment.

Waiting again

As you wait at the Mexico border, there is also a time when you cross the border legally and you wait again. Most families that have waited on the Mexico side are so excited to cross the last border only to find out they need to wait once more as they arrange their next step toward their new home. One of the most challenging steps is they find out the cost of a ticket is more than they can ever afford. The living conditions in the new country are different. There are new rules, a new language, and a new way of living that they need to adapt to as soon as possible if they want to continue their pilgrimage. Money is no longer in '*pesos*' and finding work for a couple of days or weeks as they had found in Mexico is almost impossible here. They are stranded once more.

One of the familiar stories, as we visit Sacred Heart Shelter in El Paso, is that people have a place to go, in New York, Chicago, Orlando, Michigan, or other places, but nobody can afford to move out—waiting again becomes a bittersweet reality for those who increasingly want to go home.

A harsh reality

In the last week of December, my family, and later Pastor Samuel, happened to visit Chicago to have a relaxing time and perhaps to think of something else besides the border. To our surprise, as we walked the downtown streets and around our hotel, we saw a lot of familiar-looking faces—migrants waiting. But this time they were begging for spare change in the streets of this affluent city. "Is this it?" asked Pastor Samuel, "Is this the end of the journey for the migrants who hope to work in America?" I wondered the same. Could these streets, or this alley, in

a Midwestern cold winter be the last image for those migrants who had crossed so many borders, only to die in a harsh reality? Could there be a better reality than this for those who will continue to arrive in the future?

A hope

I believe there is hope, indeed. Not long after seeing these unforgettable scenes, three Michigan churches who sent groups and visited us in November decided to sponsor four of those waiting at the border. Samuel and I were overwhelmed by this news. Out of thousands waiting at the border, at least four of them will have a ticket to travel and a new home to go to. Someone will welcome them. Someone will have the heat on. Although we are in the middle of a classic Michigan winter, people will experience the cold of Gerald R. Ford Airport but will receive them with a warm welcome. As I hear from my friends from Venezuela and Nicaragua, the white snow is beautiful and cold but inside our new homes, it is warm and cozy.

Because of your generosity and hospitality, we can have food, water, and a secure place in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Thank you for caring for us this way; *gracias!* If you are able, come and visit us in 2024.

Please Pray

- Please pray for us! The surge of people, from both sides of the border, is ongoing. We see people—even if they crossed the border legally—face swift deportation from the United States back to the place of entry, regardless of how far it is from their country of origin. Moreover, migrants continue to arrive every day no matter what the current events and policies are at the border. We feel sometimes overwhelmed and tired because there is no end to the people on the move and the stressful waiting, but as we receive messages of encouragement, prayers, and support, together we can continue and we will continue this ministry by the grace of God.
- Pray for the families who leave their country and can never go back to their loved ones.
- Pray for new churches and groups to join and visit us at the border.