December 2024

Dear friends!

This an update from Frontera de Gracia ministry, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, across from El Paso, Texas. Pastor Samuel and his team at Frontera de Gracia and I in Holland, Michigan, are very happy to connect to our churches and friends not only through the stories that we write every few months but also through the service trips to the border. When you visit, you not only hear from us but you also participate with us, as you walk, smell, touch, and see God at the border of Mexico and the United States of America.

The following are reflections from our last trip to Juarez, November 4-8, 2024. Thank you for taking the time to read our stories, and for your support and prayers.

I especially want to thank the Van Duinen family for their reflections on the trip to Juarez. In this letter, I am including a reflection from Eli (age 14), one of two youngest members in the last several trips to Mexico. I thank God for the life of our church supporters and our friends.

From Eli:

When I first saw the wall separating the US/Mexico border in Juarez, I was surprised. It was twice as tall as I imagined, and it had so much barbed wire that it looked impossible to get over it. When I saw the wall up close and touched it, Angel pointed out shoe marks on the top of the wall. This showed me how people have tried to get over it and how desperate they must have been to try.

At the wall, I also learned about the cartel. This was probably the most surprising thing for me as I didn't know about the cartel before. I learned that the Mexican cartel has a lot of power in the Mexican government and are too powerful for the government to overthrow them. Angel told me about some of the history of the cartel, about how the cartel started as dealing drugs but later decided to build on its power by taking advantage of migrants and making money off them. The cartel makes people pay them if they want to try to cross the border. If migrants don't do this, they could be killed. The cartel also offers migrants money to take backpacks full of drugs to the United States. It was scary when I heard this, and it made me feel less safe.

When I visited Frontera de Gracia, I met a young kid around eight-years-old. I saw he was playing Fortnite so I decided to talk to him. He didn't know any English, so I had to do my best to talk to him in Spanish, putting my Spanish classes to good use. I sat down and talked with him as he and I played Fortnite on his Nintendo Switch. It was fun. When it was time to go, I told him I would try to play Fortnite with him sometime online.

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This kid had a very big impact on me because it showed me that migrants are of all ages and that they enjoy the same things I do. I also saw a baby, a grandma, and an 11-year-old boy who, during his time at Frontera de Gracia, worked a part-time job before going to school every afternoon so he could help his family.

Another thing I saw was migrants on the street trying to make money. I saw people cleaning cars, selling food, or asking for money. This brought a lot of sadness to my heart because I learned that many of these people had traveled and sometimes even walked to Juarez hoping for something great, but in doing so, they used all their money to get here, and now they have nothing.

When I take a step back from all that I learned, I see that I have not shown how grateful I am for where I live and what I have. In Juarez, I heard stories about parents sending their kids on their own to cross the border or kids going on their own to find their parents. I heard stories about how many of these migrants have been hurt, killed, or put in jail. I live in the United States, where many migrants dream of going to. I don't have to leave my family or home and don't feel unsafe where I live. I am grateful for my home, my family, my church, and am glad my church is helping migrants here in Holland, MI.

Prayers:

- Pray for the people serving at the border every day and every night. May God give them strength as they continue to serve at this place.
- Pray for migrants waiting at many places in Latin America, waiting at different borders and waiting in Ciudad Juarez to hear from their appointments if they can finally cross and enter the USA. Waiting is also what we do in our Advent as we wait on our Lord Jesus Christ. Merry Christmas!
- Pray for this winter as we show hospitality to newcomers coming to our towns. May they find a place to call home.

Thanks,
Angel Lopez
Missionary of Frontera de Gracia (Border of Grace) RCA