

Children on the Border  
Reflection by Julie Reffel

Because I have spent my life working with children and youth, I was drawn to spending time with children and learning about their lives on the border. The mission of Frontera de Cristo is to support local ministries in their work to serve migrants and community members. Three ministries we participated in allowed us to consider the children on the border and how Frontera de Cristo is responding in faith: Centro de Atención al Migrante “Exodus” (CAME), Children’s Enrichment Ministry, and the “Healing our Borders Vigil”



We visited Centro de Atención al Migrante “Exodus” (CAME) to learn about their services and have dinner with the guests there. After their first contact at the Migrant Resource Center, many recently deported migrants need shelter. CAME welcomes them with open arms, providing shelter, meals, and, of course, a cup of coffee. “CAME is a place where migrants know they are safe and cared for while they decide what to do next. Just three months prior to its 21st anniversary, CAME moved into its newly expanded facility where they are now able to host up to 100 people each day.” (FdC website). After a tour and presentation, we were asked to spread out to tables so families could join us for dinner. Priscilla, Jim and I sat at a table and were joined by Jonathan, a 14-year-old boy living at CAME with his brother, Brian and parents. We tried to speak in Spanish, but asked Jonathan if he would like to practice his English. He smiled and said, “yes.” He asked us what our favorite foods, movies, TV shows were as we ate together. It seemed like such a normal conversation, yet knowing what his family had risked getting to the border and the challenges they were facing while seeking asylum made our hearts heavy. This ministry is supported by FdC and the Holy Family Catholic Church of Agua Prieta.



I also spent time with the director of the Children’s Enrichment Ministry, Marina Foreo. The Children’s Enrichment Ministry is designed to respond in faith to the realities of the drug culture. It provides services in three locations to children to meet their educational, social, psychological, physical and spiritual needs. Marina and her husband, David, left their homes in Bogota, Columbia to first establish and serve mountain churches outside of Bogota, where families had moved to escape the violence of the city. After many years there, the Mennonite Central Committee asked them to

move to Agua Prieta where they live and serve alongside Frontera de Cristo children with many needs here.

Finally, I was greatly impacted by the story of children left without their father, Carmelo Cruz Marcos. We participated in the “Healing Borders Vigil,” which has been held every Tuesday at 5:15 pm since the year 2000 to honor the names of those found dead or killed while trying to migrate through the Sonoran Desert. Every Tuesday, the group walks with a wagonload of crosses and stops to read some of the names of the 351 migrants who have died in Cochise County. They have made this pilgrimage for more than 20 years, since Dec. 10, 2000. As we walked with those crosses, we learned about some of those names. On Feb. 19, 2022, in a remote, mountainous area of the desert 30 miles northeast of Douglas, Arizona, 31-year-old Carmelo Cruz Marcos was shot and killed by a U.S. Border Patrol agent who was trying to arrest him. The Border Patrol agent said he feared for his life when Marcos threw a punch and reached for a large rock. He, in turn, shot Marcos three times in the face, chest and abdomen. Carmelo’s mother attended the vigil one Tuesday night. According to Mark Adams,

“His mother through her tears said, ‘My son was not a robber. He was going to work hard so his children could have a better life, a roof that does not leak,’”



These experiences made me very conscious of the privileged life my children, grandchildren and the children I have taught have. I will continue to pray for Frontera de Cristo and the work they do on the border to respond in faith to the question, “What is God’s will for the border?” Perhaps we can look to scripture for answers.

***Ephesians 2: 19-22. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; 21 in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.***