

## Accompanying Migrants on the Mexican Border

Submitted by Ruth Noel to Church Life (July 2019)

I spent 2 weeks in Agua Prieta, Mexico, through the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship program accompanying migrants and staff at CAME, a shelter about 6 blocks from the U.S. border crossing at Douglas, AZ.



People journeyed from near and far--large and small families with children ranging in age from a few weeks to teenagers; families with both parents, others with just moms; men traveling by themselves and also a transgender person. Most people came from the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, just north of Chiapas, where they are targeted by a variety of local cartels and gangs. The rest came from African and Asian nations. Only a very few at this crossing came from Central America or Cuba.

Getting here they passed through areas controlled by cartels where they might have been or actually had paid extortion money to continue their journey. Additionally for non-Mexicans there was the danger of being stopped and deported by Mexican immigration officials.

When they arrive their name is added to the list of folks waiting to cross legally to have an initial interview with U.S. immigration officials to ask for asylum. Then they must find and pay for housing until there is space at CAME.

CAME has the capacity for 80 people, sleeping 40 to a room, either on the floor on mats or in bunk beds. It has a kitchen, dining hall with a few computers and outdoor laundry sink and lines. A sunny patio is the only place for the children to run around and play. A small covered area has a few benches and tables are sometimes set up to play games. Despite the tight living space, people are anxious to be here because it is a safe haven. They make it home, becoming a community in continual flux.



When it is close to their turn to cross the border, we drive them to the Migrant Resource Center (MRC) near the crossing and walk them to a make shift shelter (see above). They live there for 3-7 days. Three times a day we or other volunteers accompany them to MRC to use the bathrooms and the one shower. They get breakfast and lunch at the border provided by CAME and various churches and organizations.

It is a heart breaking situation which has been made worse since my return. The Mexican National Guard recently expanded in response to our President's pressure. New recruits with little training or discipline have harassed staff and migrants at CAME.

Much like Jesus these migrants have given up the life they knew, leave behind family, community, culture and livelihood. They travel light often with no more than a change of clothes, not knowing where they will sleep and having no certainty of the outcome of their journey. I cannot imagine putting children through this ordeal unless one's living situation is unbearable. Through all they endure overall they are good natured and seem to maintain an inner peace. It is a joy to walk with them.

Are you being called to walk with them? Speaking Spanish is not a requirement. We go in pairs and your partner will speak it.

For information go to <https://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/colombia/border-accompaniment/>