

AN INCOMPARABLE GIFT

To experience the joy of a binational service partnership once was a blessing. To experience it twice was an incomparable gift. That is exactly what we received when our Agua Prieta sisters joined us for the 117th New Wilmington Mission Conference (NWMC) last week.

Supported by the Presbyterian Church (USA), NWMC is the world's oldest mission conference. Held every summer on a small, humble college campus in rural Pennsylvania, it is a week where people come together to see, hear, and be inspired by the work God is doing around the world.

This year we had the pleasure of sharing that week with three of our Frontera de Cristo mission partners, Dafne, Tali, and Yirel.

Our relationship began last year with the 2021 NWMC Summer Service team. "Summer Service" is a 60-year old program that sends a new group of young adults to a different location globally each year to work alongside long-term mission coworkers for six weeks. After their travels, the group comes back to share the stories of the people they worked with, the people they served and, most profoundly, the way experienced God's love through local community members who served them.

Last year I had the privilege to be one of ten members of the team who travelled to and worked with Frontera de Cristo. Upon our return we shared so many stories. Many of them were tales of the men and women we served and the families they were fighting for as migrants in the desert. But we also got to share stories of the joy, hope, and community we found in the welcoming arms of the Agua Prieta locals—friends like Dafne, Tali, and Yirel, without whom our binational team would be incomplete.

Last week, instead of retelling those stories ourselves, we had the joy of bringing the girls to conference in person! We watched as people who had been only stories a year before became real people, flesh and bones, in the lives of our U.S. brothers and sisters.

The young women did an incredible job sharing the heartbreak reality of the border, but also the Christ centered response work of Café Justo, the CRM, CAME, CATPSIC, and more. They spoke to everyone from little kids, to teens, to adults. Each group was eager to ask questions and learn what they could do to support the ministry.

As the bus pulled away and I waved goodbye last summer, I thought it would be years, if ever, before I'd see my sisters again. So to hug them tight and share them with our conference family a year later was so special. Words can't describe it. **To welcome these friends into our home, to laugh, to dance, to sing (in Spanish and English), and most importantly, to give them a space to share God's work towards mercy and justice at the border was an experience like no other. God was oh so present.** I hope it is the first and not the last time our worlds come together again.

—Jessica Blake, 2021 NWMC Summer Service Team with Frontera de Cristo