

January 24, 2014

Sisters and Brothers:

We are grateful to God for your commitment to come and share life and ministry with us here on the US/Mexico border! We want to let you know of some drug related violence that occurred in Agua Prieta last week and ask that you join us in prayer that the church can be instruments of peace here on the border.

On Thursday night, January 16 the "head enforcer" of the Agua Prieta cartel was killed along with two others.

On Friday, while Miriam was leading a group of students from Eastern Mennonite University for a lunch with a sister from the church, a group of armed men surrounded the home. Miriam went out to talk with them. Miriam let them know who the group was and asked them not to enter the house because they would scare the group.

Because the perpetrators of the killings on Thursday night were thought to be from outside of Agua Prieta, the drug organization apparently heightened their "neighborhood watch" program and had people reporting any suspicion vehicles entering neighborhoods. They were evidently "concerned" about the two vans that the delegation was driving.

The men left. The group had already noticed the armed men and when Miriam re-entered the house the delegation and the family were visibly shaken because they had seen the armed men.

The group was already scheduled to return to Tucson and so they crossed to Douglas and we had a time of prayer and sharing to begin processing the encounter. I talked with Byron Peachy, one of the chaplains of EMU who is the leader of the group, this morning and the students seem to be processing the experience in healthy ways and we will continue to be in communication.

We were also working with Borderlinks to facilitate a delegation from two colleges. After consultation with Borderlinks leadership, we decided it best for them to cut their time short here in AP out of precaution-- they were driving the same type of vans as the EMU group.

On early Saturday morning (around 1:30 am), there was another shoot-out where four persons were killed and three wounded. In each of the incidents, no "innocent by-standers" were harmed-- each being a "well-targeted" event directly related to drug violence.

There were fears on Saturday that there was going to be a shootout at the funeral of one of the men killed Thursday. An informal curfew—not imposed or encouraged by the government officials in Agua Prieta, but rather spread through social media—occurred on Saturday from 3 pm on. Since the gun battle on Saturday morning there have been no other shootouts between the drug organizations.

I have been in communication with US Customs and Border Protection officers, folks from the Mexican Consulate, and Mayor Danny Ortega from Douglas (who is in communication with the AP mayor and law

enforcement) as well as local sources to try to determine what the roots of the violence are and the potential harm, if any above normal, there might be for folks not directly involved in the drug trade including delegations.

Our family continues loving without fear here on both sides of the border staying in Agua Prieta over the past weekend. Pastor Rodolfo, pastor of the Lirio de los Valles church and FDC's vice president, gave an incredible sermon based on Philippians 4 on Sunday and reminded the church that we are called to be a people of peace in the midst of the violence and to not live in fear but rather open ourselves up to be salt, light and share God's peace.

In terms of receiving delegations, while we cut one delegation's time in Agua Prieta short last week, we are not cancelling delegations for February while we continue assessing the situation. If we determine that the presence of delegations would place undue possibility of danger on the local community or the members of the delegation, we would suspend delegations into Mexico until those possibilities end. If we need to suspend delegations into Mexico, we will plan on facilitating delegations on the US of the border in ways that maintain solidarity with our partners in Mexico as best as possible while being prudent.

We ask for your prayers for all those families who are involved in the drug trade and for whom violence is seen as a legitimate way of life and is a reality in their lives.

We ask for your prayers for all people who through omission or commission participate in systems of violence—whether economic, drug, political, or spiritual—and pray for courage to repent so that we may participate with God in creating a more just, peaceful and loving world.

We ask for your prayers for the community of Agua Prieta, many who are experiencing fear and uncertainty and hoping and praying that the situation does not devolve into an all-out drug war that impacts daily life in Agua Prieta.

We ask for your prayers for the children and youth of AP who see being a part of the "narco culture" as a viable and even glamorous life that they may be guided toward non-violent and legal employment and for the church that we may help live out and model alternatives, and our communities and governments that we may seek viable economic alternatives.

We ask you to join us in giving thanks to the witness of the Lirio de los Valles PC and all our church and non-church partners in Agua Prieta and pray that God would continue giving them wisdom and strength to be salt, light and instruments of God's peace in Agua Prieta.

We ask you to join us in giving thanks for the reality that "nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ." It is one thing to intellectually ascent to that reality, but last week Miriam, our family, the delegation and the church family experienced that reality in a palpable way as Miriam knew beyond a shadow of a doubt the presence of God as she was interacting with the armed men.

We are not naïve about the reality of the drug violence that erupted but give thanks for the reality that we do not live in fear and that our sense of call and faith has only been strengthened. We ask for you to pray that God will give us wisdom to faithfully serve here.

Thank you for your prayers and support!

Peace,

Mark Adams and Miriam Maldonado

PCUSA Mission Co-workers

Serving with Frontera de Cristo