



Dear Friends,

Thank you for your prayers for safe travels and meaningful encounters during the Cofán Youth Retreat. We had a great adventure in the mountains. Here is a reflection:

Orange sunlight illuminates the map stretched across laps in the motorized canoe. A warm, wet breeze tussles the hair of the nine Cofán boys as their fingers trace the squiggly black lines marking the route we had traveled over the past six days. Only a week before, this same group had huddled over the map of Ecuador on the floor of the Zábalo church. Then the map had seemed only a one-dimensional mess of lines and symbols, but for the participants of the 2018 Cofán Youth Retreat, the scribbles now represented real places and held personal memories. The boys grinned with recognition at the three now-familiar landmarks whose photographs were showcased on the map: San Rafael (Coca) Falls, the Basilica in Quito, and Mount Cotopaxi.

Our family spent several months dreaming up this trip. We felt God calling us to give a group of teenage boys from Zábalo a chance to climb some mountains, strengthen friendships beyond family ties, and experience new parts of God's beautiful creation. We carefully planned the route - beginning at Quito Mennonite Church and ending at the Ninawachi Bible Institute. We gathered the needed supplies, prayerfully chose the participants, and invited Cofán-speaking leaders to share from their faith journeys.



We did what we could to make the trip a success, but we knew we were not ultimately in control. We arranged things, looked at the map together, and then set out walking, side by side. Our family's limited understanding of the Cofán language and culture was a constant reminder that God was in control and would use this trip in ways that we cannot even imagine.

As the canoe buzzes steadily down the Aguarico River back to Zábalo, we watch the sky turn from blue to orange to black and listen to the animated voices of the young men seated beside us. We don't know exactly what they are saying, but from the words we can pick out - *Cotopaxi* (the volcano),



*acendeja* (climb), *cha'ndutsi* (freezing) - we know they are recounting memories from the trip. When their laughter drowns out the hum of the engine, we laugh too.

We may never know exactly what everyone took away from this trip, but at this moment it doesn't seem to matter that we're not the ones talking, or even understanding most of what is being said. It is our turn to sit on the edge and listen, trusting that God is at work. Right now, it feels like this is exactly where God wants us to be.

We ask for your prayers for:

- The youth we spent time with during the retreat – that they may continue to be drawn closer to God through the new insights and connections they made
- The Cofán church leaders who accompanied us: Iter, leader of the Zábalo Church, and Pastor Ramón, of the Sinangöe Church – for continued strength, love and determination as they choose each day to follow Jesus
- Our family – for guidance as we discern our next steps
- Those participating in the Learning and Fellowship tour planned for March 9-23 – for safe travels and meaningful times together



In the name of God, the eternal mystery, that enables, enfolds and enlivens all things.

Peace in Christ,

Jerrell, Jane, Sierra, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan