

Feliz Navidad from Argentina!

Christmas greetings from Argentina! As I sit here reflecting on the last 3, almost 4 months, I am continually surprised by how fast my time is flying by here. As summer approaches, I find the amount of activities packed into each week is increasing, and with a few cups of coffee or green tea each day I am trying hard to keep up with the late nights and early mornings.

Sometimes in the Argentine heat and busyness that comes with the end of school, it is easy to forget that in a 13 hour plane ride I would be surrounded by Christmas music, lights, decorations, sweaters, food, warm clothes, advertisements, and bustling excitement. From the few conversations I have had, Christmas in Argentina is much more laid-back and more of what we would have as a New Year's celebration (fireworks,

food, dancing, late nights, etc.) I am sometimes surprised when I see a few shops with Christmas lights/decorations because the heat mixed with the absence of music/ advertisements/ bustling excitement makes me forget the preparation going on at home.

Christmas blessings to friends and family at home. Be sure to build a snow man, enjoy hot cocoa, sing Christmas carols, and watch the corny Christmas movies on TV for me; and share in community as that's what this season should be all about.

Peace,

Cristina Kinz

I would love to stay in touch! My email is kinzcr01@luther.edu, you can also follow my blog at steppinglight.blogspot.com.

The song below has been a part of our experience since our first week in Argentina. It is a song that I find running through my head at random times and one that I think illustrates the spirit of community.



One Voice

*This is the sound of ONE voice
ONE spirit ONE voice
The sound of ONE who makes a choice
This is the sound of ONE voice.*

*This is the sound of voices TWO
The sound of me singing with you
Helping each other to make it through
This is the sound of voices TWO.*

*This is the sound of voices THREE
Singing together in harmony
Surrendering to the mystery
This is the sound of voices THREE.*

*This is the sound of ALL of us
Singing with love and the will to trust
Leave the rest behind it will turn to dust
This is the sound of ALL of us.*

*This is the sound of ONE voice
ONE people ONE voice
The song for everyone of us
This is the sound of ONE voice.*



Living Abundantly Through Accompaniment

A few weeks ago we (the volunteers), and Kate (the country coordinator), met up in Uruguay for one of three week-long retreats we will have throughout the year. We spent 3 days on an organic farm in the country and I felt right at home after spending the last 4 years at Luther College in Iowa. When we arrived, we were greeted by rolling green hills, crops, home-made cheese and jam, cows, simplicity, fresh air, beautiful sun sets, silence, and friendly hospitality. We spent the week in community, discussing, eating, cooking, singing, playing, relaxing, and speaking English. The last night of our time at the farm was on Thanksgiving and after a day of time spent in community we cooked a large thanksgiving meal and shared in that meal at about 9:30 at night (small reminders that we were not in fact in the Midwest but rather in a land where a 9:30 dinner is a normal, if not early time to eat).

One of the themes we discussed throughout the week was **Scarcity** and **Abundance**. As we approach the season of packed malls, Christmas parties, overdrawn accounts, and last minute wrapping I want to take a minute to share with you my thoughts from our discussion seen through two different realities.

Singing Songs in the Back of a Truck.... The first week in November we (Providencia) had a presentation of the Murga (see my first newsletter or blog if you don't know what this is) in a neighboring community about 45 minutes from the Barrio. We were unable to contract a **colectivo** (bus) to take us to the site so Omar's friend offered to transport us in his truck used to transport fruit. The truck was about half the size of a semi-truck and was enclosed on all sides. There were no seats to sit on so we loaded up 7 benches from the community center and after a bit of trial and error, were able to strategically get all seven inside of the truck. There were no steps to get inside of the truck so two of the older volunteers helped the kids one by one get on the truck. There was not enough space on the benches we ended up having the smaller kids on our laps. There was no air-conditioning or windows so we opened the side door and had one of the older boys stand guard to make sure no one fell out. Many of the roads were not paved so when we went over a large bump, heads banged against the walls and each other resulting in a simultaneous "OHHHH". We did not have cups, so the two liter bottles of soda were passed around and everyone took a swig. By the end of the day four benches had broken and the majority of us ended up on the floor. There was no radio so we sang. Man did we sing. For forty five minutes the walls of the truck were used to keep the beat and we sang songs from the Murga, songs which convey the reality impoverished areas like Providencia located in Buenos Aires as well as all over the world. The music filled the truck with positive energy

Meals in Silence... Every morning that I go to the elderly home, I ring the bell to get through the locked gate. I then walk through the **patio** (yard) where the flowers of spring are blooming, the grass is freshly cut, and the buildings block the noise from the outside. I walk inside to the **comedor** (dining hall) and take the elevator up to the first floor. I pass the library full of books and head to Maria's room, a 70-something women who moved into the hogar about 3 months ago. I sit down on her neatly-made bed and she pushes mute on the TV and offers me a cookie. I usually ask her how she is doing that day and usually get one of two answers, **mala** (bad), or **aburrida** (bored). Usually she talks about the woman across the hall who wakes her up at night, the bad food, or how she never thought she would spend the end of her life alone, in a place like this; a conversation I find common among many of the residents. We pass the shopping cart filled with clothes to be washed as we head downstairs for lunch, where the majority of the residents eat their pre-planned and nutritionist-approved meal alone at their individual tables. After we pray, the pastor turns on the radio to ease the silence.

These are two very different realities which reflect the different types of **abundance** and **scarcity** present in this world. The community of Providencia is very poor in the material sense. No one has a doorbell to ring, or a gate to keep their home safe, many of the houses don't have a floor, people eat whatever they are given or can afford, clothes are worn for days in a row, and kids don't go to school when it rains because their only pair of shoes will get wet. Despite this **scarcity** in material necessities, I experience an **abundance** of love, affection, spirit, hospitality, and energy when I am working in the community center.

The majority of the residents at the elderly home are able to live in the home because they have the financial means to do so. Food, comfort, security, and clothing are **abundant** within the walls of the hogar yet many of the residents experience a **scarcity** in contentment, family, happiness, love, and social interaction.

We live in a world driven by materialism and economic "success" and seek contentment in "bigger" and "better." But what are we robbed of in this venture to have the nicest car, that new pair of designer jeans, a large house, and the newest gadgets? I would argue that we are robbed of the need and time to come together as a community in seek of support, entertainment, and sharing of material resources and are left with an **abundance** of "STUFF" and **scarcity** of happiness, love, and sense of belonging.

We also live in a world where this drive for "STUFF" leaves many without the means to survive, resulting in violence stemmed from desperation. In the **abundance** of love, hospitality, spirit, and community that I experience in Providencia each week, I am also exposed to the consequences of the **scarcity** of basic resources needed for survival: growling tummies, wet shoes, baggy or tight clothes, lack of family support, violence, illiteracy, and fear.

How do we move forward in this world of abundance and scarcity? **Accompaniment** is the first word that comes to mind. We must "walk together in solidarity which in relationships of interdependence and mutuality" (ELCA Global Missions). I hope throughout the craziness of this Christmas season, we can all take time to grab a cup of coffee with a neighbor we don't know very well, or start up a conversation with the person in line behind us at the grocery store. It is through these relationships of interdependence and mutuality that we begin to recognize the scarcities in our own lives and in the lives of others, hopefully producing a common dream of a world where through the **abundance** of love, community, and belonging; resources are shared **abundantly**, eliminating the **scarcities** that each of are burdened by.