



CON-SOLATIO
A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

Emma Kearney's Sponsor Letter #1 - May 2021

SMALL THING WITH GREAT LOVE



Hello everyone!

I have been in Chile for a little more than two months, and I want to update you all on my time here! I arrived in Chile on February 11, and was picked up by Nico, a permanent missionary who lives in the community in Santiago. I then took a 2-hour bus ride to Valparaiso, where Delfi and Marcos picked me up. We then took a local bus to my new home. On the ride, I was amazed by the beauty of the city. Every house is a different vibrant color. I can see the ocean. There are so many people doing their everyday obligations on the street. There are kids riding bikes around the neighborhood. All of the people are very friendly and always say hello. It is honestly very hard to remember my first few days, because they felt so unreal to me. I was so new and felt like I was in a weird dream but wasn't waking up.



My community from left to right: Valeria, Marcos, and Delfi. We are holding Emilio.

I am now living with only Marcos and Valeria, but when I first arrived, there were five of us. Maylis, who lives in Argentina and is our "visitor," was staying with us for a few weeks and will continue to do so here and there to make sure all is well. Then Delfi was also here. She is from Argentina and is 22. Delfi just left on March 10th after being here for a year. It was hard watching her leave. My Spanish was still lacking, so verbal communication was tricky, but she showed me the exact way to live out this mission I am on by serving me as another friend on the mission! She loved me through actions and simple gestures of love, which is exactly what Con-solatio is all about. Delfi was always so patient with me, sounding out every syllable of any word I couldn't pronounce. She had Marcos translate for me, so I could be included. She found me when I was upset and hugged me until I stopped crying. She always made sure to bring me forward and introduce me to every person I didn't know. Delfi is gone now, but every day, I am inspired to give joy and love like hers to every person I meet.

Next, Valeria, who is 18 and is from El Salvador, has been here for 4 months. She has an amazing talent for drawing and painting. Valeria is the most transparent person I have ever met, and it's so nice

because it makes it easier to get to know her. She knows a good amount of English, so it can be tempting to talk with her more in English than in Spanish. We both help each other with our own languages. We enjoy making each other try to do exercises every day, which especially helps train us for running around with all the little kids. Finally, Marcos, age 24, is from Poland. He also is mostly fluent in English. During my first days, Marcos was a very big help to me, explaining everything and just talking a lot. Marcos finished his degree in law, really enjoys talking about politics, and almost always cooks something having to do with potatoes. Both Marcos and Valeria have both been very kind in translating anything I don't understand. It is very sad to be without Delfi, but we are slowly getting used to it and figuring out how to live our everyday life here without her. It is nice because as a community, we have a meeting once a week to plan the upcoming week. If we have any comments or ideas to make the way we live better, we can share and discuss until we come to an agreement.

My days usually look like this: At 7:30 a.m. we have Morning Prayer in our chapel (we have the Holy Eucharist in our home). Then we have breakfast together at about 8:00 a.m. Next, we have an hour of Adoration one by one. During the other two hours while not adoring, we can do laundry, work on any projects we might have in the house, study Spanish, grocery shop, or cook/clean if it is our day of "Permanencia." (Permanencia rotates every day between everyone. It means you are the person in charge of cooking and cleaning the kitchen, and you lead the Rosary/the prayers in the chapel.) Next is lunch, usually somewhere in between noon or 1 p.m. After lunch, until 3 p.m., we continue finishing anything else we have to do that we didn't finish in the morning, or we rest. Also at this time, kids will usually come around and want to play. Sometimes in the morning the kids come, but starting about a month ago they went back to school, so now it is only in the afternoon that they come. At 3 p.m. we say the Rosary, and all are welcome. As of right now, unfortunately we are on a stricter lockdown, so there are no churches open. So, after the Rosary, we watch the Mass online. After watching Mass, we go out and visit people. When Delfi was here we went in groups of two, but now that it is only three of us, we all go together. Two or three days a week, we have a day for the children. We either gather up all the kids and go to the *cancha* (a cement soccer field that also has a playground beside it) to play soccer, or we have the kids come to our house for other activities. Before the lockdown, at 6:40 p.m., usually a woman named Monica would generously pick us up and bring us to daily Mass. After that is Evening Prayer, dinner, and then a final night prayer. Sometimes we go to someone's house or someone comes to ours to eat dinner (this also sometimes happens with lunch). The normal Chilean dinner is usually a simple sandwich or soup because the big meal of the day is lunch. A classic Chilean street food is the "*complete*", which is a hot dog with diced up tomato, avocado, and mayonnaise. It may sound weird, but it is strangely delicious. They also have a lot of empanadas here, and there is always half of a hard-boiled egg and a singular olive in every single one, along with whatever filling there is. On Thursdays we have a discussion group called an "I-school" where we read a text about the faith and discuss with some friends of our community, or Maylis calls and guides us in discussion. Once a week we all do Adoration together and then have cleaning for the remainder of the morning. This is the rough schedule



These are some of the little kids who come around most often. This picnic was part of Delfi's celebration for her departure before she left. Starting from the left and going in a circle: Stevie, Fede, Richard (Nephew of Fede), Milo, Mathew, and Emilio (Brother of Stevie).

of our day, but we need to be flexible because things always come up, and we need to be able to rearrange our schedule for our friends in the neighborhood that we serve.

Now, the most exciting thing for me to tell you about: the people I have met!!! There are so many, it's hard to choose who to write about. The first thing I have noticed here that has been an overall theme is the joy and welcome of these people. They all greet me with a hug and a kiss and excitedly ask me where I am from. Many people love trying to speak in English to me! Just a few days ago, I was greeted by a girl whom I had never seen before. She ran up to me and, in Spanish, said, "Tia, I know you!! I have seen you before!!" Many people in the street will say hello and are so friendly even if they don't know us, because they know we are Con-solatio, and they love having the presence of our mission in their neighborhood. It is so cute to watch the way that even the "cool" kids are outside our house all the time shouting "Tia! Tio!" (They all call us Tia or Tio, which means "aunt" or "uncle" in Spanish). Every day they bike or run here to ask for water.... even though their house is in the same neighborhood.



This is Exequiel, 18, who bought us the broom. He is very good at soccer and is very respectful, always calling us Tia or Tio even though he is almost the same age as us. I couldn't keep my eyes open in any pictures with him because since we were in The Cancha for soccer, it was so sunny!

Exequiel, an 18-year-old boy, came over one day with a brand-new broom he had bought for us, because he had noticed that our broom was torn apart and old. Wilson, who is 10, will tell other people to talk slowly since I can't understand much Spanish. He helps me cook and prays the Rosary with us. Christopher, 17, came to our house one day and asked me if I could help him with his English homework. Stevie, 12, pulled Marcos aside and asked him how to say, "Thank you, Tia" in English so that I could understand. Nina and Violeta (sisters) do my makeup, hair, and nails. The most humbling thing is how every kid tries to talk to me, and I'm more of a baby than they are. I can't understand anything they say. I've never felt stranger in my life. I never thought I would be having a 10-year-old explaining to me how to say "My shirt is blue."

When I first started to visit people, all I felt was guilt. It felt so wrong having all these people who have such broken lives—mentally, physically, financially, etc.—

giving me juice, soda, cake, or even a whole dinner! But slowly I have realized this: for some of these people, we are the only light in their lives. We are the only people who will come over for a sit-down dinner. It is amazing because the thing that is giving me the most anguish and guilt is what gives these people the greatest joy. In the United States, I have always focused more on the bible verses about sacrifice, leaving what you have, serving others. When I was preparing to leave for this mission, all I had in my mind was that I was going to leave everything—my family, friends, comforts like my language, my home, my culture, the cute 5 children I have been nannying for, etc. I had in my mind that I was going to have zero comfort—little food, no sugar, not much special treatment. I was going to give the special treatment and receive nothing. Or so I thought... so far, I have been given so much from these people. Hugs, kisses, food, and even being comforted and told that I will be forever protected. This is all from the people I had the intention of doing this for!! This is why I am humbled. I have realized that this giving of their things is what gives them happiness. And it makes sense. We serve the ones we love. And it shows in different ways. As we eat our friends' food, we listen to them talk about their hardships, and comfort them as they cry. What is just so amazing is that they will do this for us



This is Laura, who loves to call us and feels as if we are her children. She always offers us tea and toast whenever we go to her house. She loves to show us her photos or past cards that other missionaries have given her.

too if we ever needed it. There is a true loyalty and love between the missionaries and the friends of the neighborhood that is so pure.

Every day, I have a lot of time to think, as I visit an elderly person who is talking at a million miles per hour and I can barely make out one word. I am constantly thinking: *why do these people like us?* I am sitting here in their house and eating their food, and they are happier than they have been in a long time. Why? Because of a simple friendship. And when I say simple, I mean simple. We don't give them money or anything like that. They wouldn't expect it either. Thomas Aquinas says, "Friendship is the source of the greatest pleasures, and without friends even the most agreeable pursuits become tedious." This has proven to be true. Let me share with you some example of these peoples' needs for simple companionship: Laura, who has terminal cancer and who doesn't go out on windy days for fear of literally falling over, calls our house extremely often. In fact, a few days ago, some kids were over, and the phone started ringing. Wilson, a 10-year-old boy, pretended to pick up the phone and without even looking at the caller ID said, "Hello Laura!!" pretending to be one of us missionaries. We go with her to the hospital just to wait in a line outside for two hours for her to get her meds. We go to her house and she talks to us about the drama she has, her health problems, or her experiences in life.

Milo, age 20, has come to our house for many years and continues to come all the time. His brother Francisco died a few weeks ago. Milo came to our house first thing in the morning to tell us and sit with us. Along with his family, we were pretty much the only other people at the wake service. A few nights ago, Milo came to our house at about 7 pm. I went outside and he was upset. I could understand enough to know it was about Francisco, so we just sat there while I consoled him as he cried.

For people like these, Con-solatio is their comfort. Con-solatio is very important for them, and it's not even about a particular person—it's the home itself. The people know they can come and any missionary will help them and show them love, without tiring or rejecting them. It's sometimes hard to see the effects of our actions day to day, but when I think of the people individually and their needs that we help them with, I'm satisfied. Why do these children come to our house to ask for water? They don't actually care about the water; they love our presence. And they have for years. I see pictures of past missionaries here, and I see the same faces of our friends but years younger. They never stop loving it.

For Easter, we went to the mission house in Santiago so that we could have Mass, Eucharist, and Confession. We were there for 6 days starting on Holy Thursday, and our time there was very beautiful. When we came back, everything felt rejuvenated. I was very



This is Milo, 20 years old, who comes to our house a lot and who's brother Francisco recently passed away. He loves soccer and to just talk with us while drinking some tea we make him. Every single day, Milo offers up his rosary for his brother Francisco. Even during our time of quarantine with Covid, Milo would come and sit outside just to say hi and talk with us for a few minutes.

happy to be back in our neighborhood, and what I loved even more, was the way the little kids who come around the most, Emilio, Stevie, Fede, and Richard, showed up. Richard, the youngest, said, "We missed you so much. We came here every day looking for you. We played soccer in your yard." I never would have imagined Richard telling us that, as he acts like the toughest 8-year-old out there. Laura told us that while we were gone, she felt like her own children were missing. Our neighbor Antonio came over just to say that he missed us. For me, these small things the people of my neighborhood say or do brings me so much joy; I can't stop smiling.

There is a boy named Joseph, who doesn't talk very much. He struggles with drugs and he doesn't live with his family. Every single time he comes to our house, I am so happy. He drinks a cup of tea or coffee, and doesn't even say much. But he comes to us. He doesn't just sit in his house; he likes to sit in our house and have our company. I try to talk to him, and sometimes we need google translate to help us. He lives very simply. He told me he likes to walk a lot. When he walks, he thinks of how his family is disappointed in him for having friends who only do drugs. I think he feels a very warm welcome and seeks love here at our home, as he feels like an outcast with his family.

Now, life is often very joyful here, but this joy is sewn in between immense pain and brokenness. I am still slowly hearing each person's story unfold, and every time, it's painful to find out. One kid held his dying father in his arms at only 8 years old, because he was involved with gangs. A little 12-year-old boy, who used to be a close friend of the community, turned to gangs and drugs during the first coronavirus shutdown. He was very close with Delfi and then when he came back from the 2-month quarantine, he had a gun and was involved with gangs and could no longer come here. It was very heartbreaking for Delfi. She told me about him a few weeks ago, and I just saw him this past week for the first time. The story alone was heartbreaking, but actually seeing this little boy's story put with the face of a 4-foot 11 boy, and knowing his little innocence was ruined by drugs, gangs, and guns in only 2 months, was so hard.

A little while ago, I met Grace and Armando. Everything seemed perfect in their home. Armando cooked us dinner, gave us many options for beverages, gave us snacks, and prepared us delicious "Completo". His daughter Grace made sure to speak very slowly and with good pronunciation for me. Then at one point, Marcos asked Grace a question, which led her to a very long story. I watched Grace go from happiness to sadness—to having tears roll out of her eyes. It wasn't until reading Marcos' sponsorship letter that I came to fully understand everything. Grace's sister who had always "been better" than her, died from drug abuse with only 44 pounds to her body. Grace's husband, who she had one son with, was an alcoholic and abusive. Armando and Grace have a tough relationship. Armando's wife left him for the deceased sister's ex-boyfriend. Armando himself is an alcoholic. But this isn't all. I found out the question that Marcos had asked her that started this whole story was, "How is your faith so strong?" Unexpected, I know! She said that as a child, she was never loved. Her sister was always favored. But one day a person told her at age 15 that God loved her. Ever since, she has had faith. Not only do these people feed us, love us, hug us, give us gifts, but they inspire us. They give me another reason to have faith! I don't think there's anything these people haven't given me. This is what continues to blow my mind.

I started this letter after my first month here, but I kept restarting it because I felt like these stories might not portray how amazing it is here; how much these people depend on even just seeing us in the streets and the beautiful things that I have been able to experience. As I was talking with my mom and dad on my most recent rest day, I was explaining my frustration to them. They pointed out that these small things are exactly what my mission is and exactly what I should write about! As I tell you about these tiny happenings, they all seem small and unimportant. But looking around at every person that we talk with here, I can truly

see how beautiful this mission of compassion is. My mom quoted one of my favorite saints, St. Teresa of Calcutta, saying, "I don't do great things. Only small things with great love." And it's true. These little actions that show that another human being cares for these people is the most important thing to them.

We just finished up quarantining because Valeria and I had Coronavirus (somehow, I have gotten it twice within 3 months!). It was a strange time, not being able to see anyone, but we had time to do some things around the house. For example, I enjoyed fixing up our laundry area on our back porch, organizing, and cleaning all our sheets and towels. We painted the front of our house and are working on painting the main room in our house to make it more vibrant. Around Delfi's time of departure, I was thinking about leaving. Now, I already hate remembering that I thought that. I love my new home here and my new friends. I love being able to be here for these people. They even make the fleas worth it!

I hope this letter finds everyone well. Thank you to all of you for all of your support. It is because of you that this is possible, and so I hope that you can feel happy after reading this letter to know that your sponsorship is greatly appreciated by me, my community, and the people in my neighborhood. And I hope this gives you a better picture of what I am doing so that you can better understand! You all are and will continue to be in my prayers.

With love,

Emma



This is Cami (left) and Maxi (right). They are very intelligent and always want to learn something new. They are some of the sweetest kids of the neighborhood. They never cause problems and always want to play.