

FROM ARGENTINA WITH HUGS

JOSH AND ERIN

YAGM Newsletter · Sept-Oct Edition

Greetings from Grand Bourg!

It has been two and a half months since we left Nebraska, carrying a couple of suitcases, the love and support of our home communities, and lots of excitement for the journey ahead of us. Starting on August 14th, we spent a week in Chicago at YAGM (Young Adults in Global Mission) Orientation with over sixty other volunteers who were headed all over the world; preparing for cross-cultural experiences, learning about the theology of accompaniment, and centering ourselves spiritually for the year ahead. On August 22nd we arrived in Buenos Aires where, together with the five other Argentina/Uruguay YAGM, we attended language training, learned about practicalities like public transportation and currency, and began to better understand the specific contexts in which we would be living. Finally, on August 31st we arrived in our new community in Grand Bourg, marking a new chapter in our lives in which we will work and live alongside God's people in this place. We are so happy to be able to share our stories and the stories of our new community with you in this newsletter. Thank you for accompanying us!

Read our blog at joshanderin.com



Top: Erin, Josh, and the rest of the Argentina/Uruguay crew get ready to depart from Chicago for Buenos Aires. **Middle:** Erin teaches a song to the first communion students at Congregación San Lucas. **Bottom:** Erin and Josh enjoy homemade empanadas (Josh's favorite!) during a welcome party at Congregación San Lucas on their first night in Grand Bourg (photo: Blanca Araujo). **Background:** Front facade of Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago where YAGM Orientation took place.

"WHAT WILL YOU TWO BE DOING IN GRAND BOURG?"

We are finally able to answer that pesky question that everyone asked in the months leading up to our departure! We each have three different work site placements, two that we share and one apart.



Congregación San Lucas

Our main work site and community of faith, San Lucas has activities throughout the week including first communion and confirmation classes, youth group, children's league, women's group, choir, guitar and piano classes, Sunday morning worship, etc. We have especially enjoyed getting to know the youth of the congregation. They are so full of energy and joy, and are models of stewardship as they give their time every week to be catechists for the younger children. They always seem to be singing, playing guitar, or making music in some way. Pastor Eva and the whole congregation have welcomed us so warmly into their community; we feel very at home.

IEA is the Lutheran school adjacent to Congregación San Lucas. Many of the same families whose children attend the school also have ties to the congregation. So far we have been able to accompany IEA by participating in their English department, helping students prepare for upcoming exams by conversing in English. We also had the honor of being on a jury panel for their first annual English Talent Awards, an awesome event involving elaborate homemade costumes, silly English lyrics, and surprise "celebrity" appearances by 6th graders dressed as One Direction, Lady Gaga, and others.



Instituto Evangélico Argentino



Hogar de Ancianos
"Juan M. Armbruster"

Hogar Armbruster is a Lutheran retirement home in a nearby city called Jose C. Paz. I (Erin) travel there one or two days per week to be in a ministry of presence with the residents. I bring my guitar because some like to listen or sing along to music. Others just want to chat (and chat, and chat!). Some residents just need a hand to hold or a cheek to kiss to let them know they are not alone. The stories and wisdom that these dear people share continually surprises and inspires me.

Meulén is a vocational center for adults who are differently abled which gives them daily opportunities to interact with others and learn a variety of skills. It was started by a number of parents who wanted to give their children such opportunities. I (Josh) go to Meulén twice a week to help out with workshops such as carpentry and pottery. I also give a weekly class teaching computer skills including using the keyboard and mouse and navigating common programs such as Word and paint. It is beautiful to be a part of this community that lives and works together as they celebrate the abilities that each has to offer.



Meulén

First: During a Service for Peace, Pastor Eva invites San Lucas parishoners to imagine how they might participate in God's work of bringing peace to the world and to their communities. **Second:** Josh and Erin introduce themselves to the students, teachers, and families gathered for IEA's first annual English Talent Awards (photo: Blanca Araujo). **Third:** Residents gather in the dining room of Hogar Armbruster for a spirited First Day of Spring Celebration. **Fourth:** A group from Meulén works together to paint a banner at an outdoor activities event. **Background:** White calla lilies decorate the sanctuary for a baptism.

BIENVENIDOS

For the LORD your God is God of gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.
-Deuteronomy 10:17-19

God likes to turn stuff upside down.

To God's people, who used to be strangers in Egypt, God gives a land of their own. To suffering orphans and widows, God promises justice. To strangers, God gives food and clothing.

And, as it turns out, these two YAGM are not exempt from this pattern. To two lifelong churchgoers who have regularly participated in such activities as "Peer Ministry" and "Hospitality Committee," God has given the new roles of "stranger," and "outsider." Part of our experience these first two months in Argentina has been having our normal paradigm of insider-outsider turned upside down. We are experiencing what it is to feel out of place, to not know the language, to be afraid of rejection, to not know how to behave during church, to have to lip sync to all the songs, to depend on the kindness of others. And we are experiencing daily, and deeply, the beauty of being welcomed and loved.

On this page we want to share with you a few stories of how the people of Grand Bourg have welcomed us.



On September 29th after Sunday worship, the congregation gathered to surprise Josh with a birthday celebration, complete with handmade, Husker-themed decorations to make him feel at home. Later that day, the youth planned an outing to a nearby shopping mall, which they told us is the coolest thing to do for your birthday in Argentina. Though it was Josh's first birthday away from home, he nonetheless spent it surrounded with lots of love.

with our friend Juan de Dios (pictured). He helped her learn how to take public transportation to get to the rehearsals from her work, photocopied the music for her, and introduced her to a whole new community of friends. Singing in these choirs is now one of her favorite parts of the week.



The best welcome Erin has received so far has been the invitation to sing in two local choirs



Every Saturday during children's league, a group of boys plays soccer on the church's patio. They invite Josh to play with them even though he is much older than them and even though that sometimes means the teams have unequal numbers of players. Although Josh and the boys don't always understand one another because of the language barrier, they are able to bond over the shared experience of a good soccer game.

outdoor barbecue of steak, chorizo, chicken and more. One family from the congregation that has been particularly welcoming [Alejandro (right), Blanca, Enzo (left), and Macarena] recently invited us to an asado at their house. It was a fun evening filled with warm food, mutual storytelling, and much laughter (often over language-induced misunderstandings!).

The most special and traditional way to spend time together in Argentina is over an asado, an



God of surprises, you never fail to turn our expectations upside down. When we are strangers, give us food, clothing, courage, and a community to receive us. When we have the opportunity to welcome others, give us generosity, open doors, and warm hearts full of love. Give us the humility to both welcome and to receive welcome from others. Amen.

HOLY HILARITY

We believe that hilarity in our lives is a gift from God, and in that spirit we hope to share a story in each newsletter highlighting an experience that was silly, embarrassing, awkward, or otherwise hilarious. As you might imagine, these stories are in no short supply as we try to navigate differences in language and culture here in Argentina!

This edition's story comes to you from Tierra Santa, the world's first and only religion-themed amusement park. Park staff dress in "back in Jesus' time" clothing, Roman soldiers roam the sidewalks, and there are (creepy) statues everywhere you look depicting Biblical stories or famous religious figures. You could literally insert yourself into your favorite miracle of Jesus for a great photo-op!



Josh as an angry Roman soldier at Tierra Santa park.

The highlights of the park were animatronic shows depicting the Last Supper and the birth of Jesus, a laser show about Creation, and the unforgettable 30-foot animatronic Jesus that "rose again" hourly from behind a fake mountain while the Hallelujah Chorus played over loudspeakers. Needless to say, the experience was an exercise in suppressing giggles, and we left wondering how to say "over the top" and "cheesy" in Spanish.

OUR FIRST ANNIVERSARY



On September 8th, we celebrated our first anniversary of marriage. After Sunday morning worship at San Lucas, the congregation surprised us with a party featuring a banner that read "Feliz 1 Aniversario," a picture of us as a cake topper, and gifts: a traditional mate gourd and bombilla and a jar of honey. We are so grateful for our home community that witnessed our marriage one year ago and continues to support us, and for our host community that will walk with us through our second year.

Erin and Josh celebrate their first anniversary of marriage (photo: Blanca Araujo).

Thank You! With your help, we met and exceeded our fundraising goal of \$8,000, meaning that we are fully funded for this year as YAGM. We want to extend our deep thanks to you for all the ways in which you supported us in our processes of preparing and departing. Here are some ways you can continue to accompany us as we learn to accompany the people of Grand Bourg:

Pray for us and let us know you are praying for us. We want to pray for you too.

Read our blog. We can only fit so much into one newsletter, so keep up with more recent stories, photos, and reflections online (joshanderin.com).

Send letters. We would love to get a good, old fashioned piece of mail from you! (Please note that it may take around three weeks to arrive).

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