



# Dispatches from the Cono Sur: Río de la Plata

Young Adults in Global Mission Newsletter Vol. 01, No. 02

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## (the) Leisure issue

**We were overlooking** the balcony of Montevideo's main city government building on a recent, tepid Monday night. The three of us were tying the last knots to a banner emblazoned above the main plaza for a bicycle rally held by the JPC's violence prevention program, Claves. It was set for the next day. All seemed fine when a group of individuals, dressed mostly in black and with numerous styles of bodily piercings, approached us, accompanied by an official from the city government. The group carried with them their own banner. The government official introduced them as organizers for Montevideo's convention of tattoo artists, which likewise began the next day. After some discussion, it appeared—from my fragmented understanding—that we had misplaced our banner. It should have been one more level above and to the back. We explained that we had not known about the other assigned location and gave our reasons for wanting it directly in front: mainly as a visual tool for the start of the

bicycle ride, when it was planned to throw colored streamers from the balcony. Further discussion ensued, after which it was settled that since our event was for the morning only, the organizers for the convention of tattoo artists would hold off putting up their banner until the afternoon, after ours was taken down.

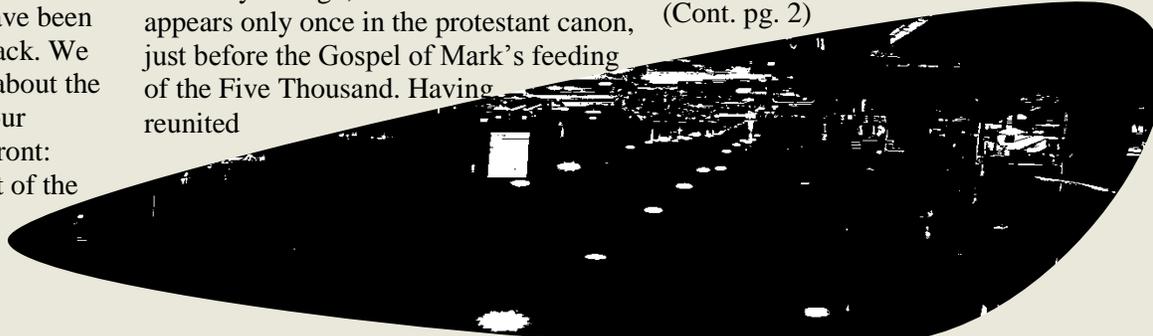
Yet, perhaps even more perplexing was what happened afterward. Even though our interaction had benefited them nothing, the spokespeople for the tattoo artists proceeded to introduce themselves and ask about our campaign. There seemed no practical reason to this. After all, our immediate, formal encounter had been settled: whatever came next was unnecessary to the utility of both sides, and their time, labor, and resources. Nevertheless, the action still felt resonant, had done some kind of work.

Oddly enough, the word "leisure" appears only once in the protestant canon, just before the Gospel of Mark's feeding of the Five Thousand. Having reunited

"(Jesus) said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat." --Mark 6:31 (NRSV)

with Jesus since their first sending as disciples, and having just mourned the death of John the Baptist, imaginably the disciples were exhausted and hurting. And when they do reach a place of rest, they find the crowds had followed them there, with Jesus insisting to continue teaching even into the late hours of the day and in a remote, inaccessible place. Here, the interpreted difference between rest and leisure is interesting. Where rest is an activity separate from the disciples' condition of work, drawing them into the personal and intimate realm, the word "leisure" instead implies the capacity to break from a certain state of being—a moment not entirely separate from metabolic or social acts, but nonetheless one intervening as a rupture from previous cycles of work and emotional depletion.

Often, the "work" of Christian accompaniment has left me confused, even timid. There is the "work" of  
(Cont. pg. 2)



Along with the common embrace of our sending and inviting communities around the United States, the world, the ELCA at large, and the whole of Christ's body: Thank you again for your continued support. The intention of this newsletter is to inform and to create dialogue, and you may feel free to email me anytime at [jperkins16@gmail.com](mailto:jperkins16@gmail.com)

# Centro Juvenil Flor de Maroñas



**Welcome** to the front gate of, Juventud Para Cristo's youth center in the neighborhood Flor de Maroñas! Spread throughout the youth center's courtyard (seen below) are several large and vibrant hand painted murals. One says "Ser feliz es una decision". This year, one of the JPC's other youth centers, the Centro Juvenil Sebastopol, hosted a soccer tournament with several other youth centers around Montevideo. In pink below is the Flor de Maroñas team,

who stand undefeated at 4-0! These matches are also a great chance for youth, educators, and volunteers alike to sit back, relax and get to know each other on the sidelines.

## 20 años

This year, the Centro Juvenil Flor de Maroñas celebrates its 20th anniversary. Today it remains an essential place of support for many youth and families in the neighborhood. The JPC employs a staff of educators, social workers, psychologists, and additional workshop leaders who work with the kids each week, offering opportunities ranging from educational support, classes on cooking, percussion, salsa dancing, and art, exercise classes in the neighborhood plaza, access to computers, transportation to healthcare appointments, and, of course, a soccer club. Each year, the youth center also participates in promoting the Claves campaign for the prevention of domestic and sexual violence in Uruguay.



(Cont. from pg. 1) physically being present and working with a community who has welcomed me. Yet, whenever I reflect on my time through an ethic of "work," my presence seems futile to any sense of utility, production, or practical use of resources.

But maybe too, this is a fault of my disguising the concept of grace. After all, supported by the grace of the church at large, I have already been given stable shelter, access to food, and a community. I have the freedom and mobility to step outside of the immediate social and economic imperatives of my home society, and the responsibility of determination of a host community; my time has a definite privilege, one afforded to leisure. Indeed, it seems that when our lives feel overburdened by the ephemeral and dominating cycle of perceived obligations around us, it's the idea of leisure that becomes needed to disrupt this. We seek a sense of revitalization, to waken into movement, a new perspective by grace. Leisure seems to strangely occupy a space within the extension of grace: the moment where grace allows us to manifest our time into a form of coexistence with our neighbors. Even more, the Gospel of Mark shows us that grace is no denial of pain, loss, or an escape from the complexities and daily realities of life. Jesus' miracle of creation, in fact, is predicated on this coexistence. (Cont. on next page)

In October, when Claves launched its annual campaign against acts of violence, sexual, and domestic abuse, it likewise introduced a new slogan for the year: “Nuestros gestos crean convivencia” (Our actions create coexistence). Certainly, it’s a powerful statement to make, one I’ve been thinking about ever since I’ve arrived. What strikes me the most is its act of creation. In the Gospel of Mark, when the disciples question the potential cost of such a meal, Jesus questions them and instead takes them directly within the presence of those gathered to provide. It’s an act distinctly outside of the disciples’ idea of work, indebtedness, and exchange of material. Jesus shows that accumulation without a mutual coexistence will be inevitably futile, and even exhausting, when in the process of accumulation for self-gain we create debts and divisions. By this grace, it says, “And all ate and were filled.” There seems to be a fault when our leisure remains passive. When it seeks to accumulate material, time, or energy for a means of self-consumption and excess—when it takes away a given means of coexistence with others. When witness is not turned into testimony, when we turn away from participation in the mutual process of God’s continuous creation that bears new truths into reality. Perhaps more simply: leisure begs of us the age-old question: What do we do with time?



Since 1995, the JPC’s program Claves has been giving voice and providing educational and organizational materials to local communities speaking out against violence against young children and adolescents. Today, Claves is supported by efforts within 17 countries in Latin America and Europe. In October, Claves launched its annual campaign “Un trato por un buentrato,” in Uruguay. The phrase roughly means “an agreement for good treatment,” and looks to mobilize Uruguayans to focus on positive forms of relationships with children and adolescents. This includes a “vaccination” campaign, where youth and young adults are given the ability to symbolically “vaccinate” adults in the community against “maltrato,” or abuse. Claves also publishes materials to help raise awareness to sexual trafficking and exploitation in densely tourist and commercialized areas of Uruguay.



1908 is the official number of reported cases of abuse in Uruguay the past year. Recognizing the number of instances of abuse is most likely higher, due to unreported cases, the Claves bicycle rally plans to make this number visible by going to several public government buildings to have public officials pledge to work towards policies that eliminate these environments of abuse in Uruguay.

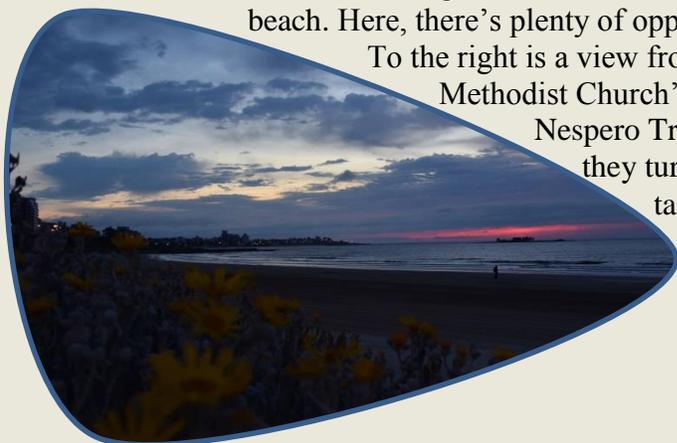


Outside the Claves office in Colonia Nicolich, Uruguay. We made several of these raised gardens for the spring, planting 3 varieties of lettuce, Swiss chard, and tomato for office staff and visitors.

## When in the Neighborhood...

Welcome to the neighborhood of Buceo, Montevideo! Below to the left is a snapshot of the sunrise on Buceo beach. Here, there’s plenty of opportunity to play volleyball, soccer, or even shuffleboard on the beach.

To the right is a view from Juan Espinosa of Buceo’s Methodist Church, as well as the Methodist Church’s International Volunteer House. Also pictured is the branch of a Nespero Tree growing in the backyard of the Volunteer House. This time of year, they turn a ripe yellow, with a crisp and tangy citrus flavor.





Also, be sure to stop by one of the many farmer's markets in the area. Street markets are prevalent all throughout Montevideo, including this one right on Juan Espinosa, and offer easily accessible, cheap, and fresh produce—and even meat, fish, and bakery products, as well as cleaning supplies, house plants, and recycled goods. Some sellers even have VHS videocameras and cassettes for sale, just in case you feel some 20th century nostalgia!

And don't forget Church on Sunday. To the right is the congregation of the Iglesia Espronceda taken last year after completion of the courtyard mural behind. The congregation has been around for about 110 years in the same neighborhood of Unión, Montevideo. The church has been in its current location for the past 30 years. In addition to a main sanctuary, the church has a communal kitchen, several educational spaces, a large multi-use courtyard, a separate building on the same lot with two Sunday school classrooms,



Again, I would like to extend a big thanks to you for all the ways that you have supported me this year. This month, **I would like to invite you in prayer for situations affecting the community here:**

- For the neighborhood of Flor de Maroñas: for the work of reconciliation and an end to violence
- For those dealing with grief, and those who are hospitalized

### Mariposa, poema

En el aire estaba impreciso, tenue, el poema. Imprecisa también llegó la mariposa nocturna, ni hermosa ni agorera, a perderse entre biombos de papeles. La deshilada, débil cinta de palabras se disipó con ella. ¿Volverán ambas? Quizás, en un momento de la noche, cuando ya no quiera escribir algo más agorero acaso que esa escondida mariposa que evita la luz,

como las Dichas.

--Ida Vitalepoeta  
*De "De procura de lo imposible" 1998*  
Poeta, ensayista uruguaya. Galardonada el XIII Premio Internacional de Poesía Federico García Lorca en 2016.

### Butterfly, poem

In the air it was imprecise, thin, the poem. Imprecise as well came the nocturnal butterfly, neither beautiful nor foreboding, to lose itself between paper folds. The frayed, weak strand of words scattered with her. Will they return? Perhaps, in a moment of the night, when I would not want to write anything more foreboding in case this obscure butterfly which dispels light,

like these words.

--Ida Vitale  
trans. by Justin Perkins  
Uruguayan poet and essayist.



Through this newsletter, by witness and testimony, I ask that you would likewise consider this an exercise in accompanying our neighbors around the globe.

**If you would like to send mail, here's the address:**

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Juan Espinosa 1493  
11400 Montevideo, Uruguay