

To my Brothers and Sisters of the ELCIC:

Warm Greetings to All!

I have worked for four and half years now as a Pastor in the Patagonia. It has occurred to me to put in writing what has touched my life during this time and to share it with you my friends.

I remember very much the first day that I took a trip through the Patagonia and the people who took me to Cushamen and later to the city of Esquel. There was very little time between my ordination and my arrival; so far from my home and the ones I loved, in just days. I said little in that moment, there is little that can be said when one knows these places that are so far and yet so marvellous. Even today when I travel the roads that unite Esquel and Cushamen the sensations are the same. The roads in the Patagonia are harsh and difficult but at the same time are so important and majestic, all of which is a metaphor for those who would travel them. The roads are lonely but filled with the smells, colours and dreams and memories of this encounter with God.

I became friends with the cold and the wind and I became accustomed to invite them along for a coffee or tea at the side of the road. They say that the sun itself suffers from the cold, and it is right!, in winter it begins early to rest on the mountains to later hide itself certainly searching for respite from the low temperatures.

The return trip is also filled with images; memories, faces, hugs and the beginning of another week. I arrive at the house very late and tired but overflowing with joy and loaded with emotions that I want to share. It would have been difficult to arrive at my house without someone there waiting for me to return, hugging tiredness and sharing their smiles. I give thanks to God for giving to me Maylen and Micaela to be at my side.

I could share so many stories and so many anecdotes that I could fill pages and pages just trying to describe to you the significance in my life of the time I have spent in the Patagonia. The words never stop nor would I know how to fill a page with all the sentiments and feelings that I have to tell of my life.

To live in the Patagonia is not a simple thing for a young person who has lived all his life in large cities. The loneliness, the climate, the distances, the high cost of living, but none of these things can compare with the love and care that I have received in these years. I remember my first birthday in Esquel, far from my family and my friends. During this time my mailbox was full of cards and letters sent from so far from people who were thinking of me, in my work, that they had me in their prayers and the letters brought their support and their care. I keep each one of these cards and letters, and I still continue to receive them, like a great treasure. I keep them in a chest where I guard

my keepsakes. It is a chest of balm that is very necessary to apply when times are difficult or simply in times when I need to lift my spirits.

I will never be able to erase the image in my mind of the women in Cushamen waiting for my arrival, with a fire and the salon opened and the altar prepared and a coffee with milk to recoup the strength and energy within me. These images will never leave me.

I have had the blessing to do my ministry together with some wonderful people; examples of the faith, of hope and sacrifice. I have been able to see the strength and the dedication of those who work on the land in the Patagonia putting up with the rude climate and arid land fighting against diversity that comes from nature and from people. They have rough hands from working. They have experienced the darkness and the warmth of an adobe ranch house. They have anxiously walked many kilometres to visit neighbouring houses, just so someone would notice or give a sign that they were not lost. I have come to appreciate the value of the word, the greatness of simple people, the love and respect for the land, their generosity in spite of what they might not have, and in reality abandon riches, have no interest in the markets and because of their gratefulness of life they value more highly the love of life. I have learned much from these First Nations peoples, of their faith, their culture, their struggles and their hope. Undoubtedly I have received more than I could have ever given.

How much I wish that you could be here with me! Sometimes while I am in Cushamen I stop for a second and stand in silence and close my eyes and imagine all the people that are at my side and that are part of this mission in the Patagonia; in the middle of all this my thoughts take me into the middle of the artisan workshop and I can see the group of women working together making wool on their spinning wheels. In the middle of the salon wood burns in the fireplace and on top of it heats a kettle of water, ready to share maté. Amelia prepares the maté with a little of yerba (type of herb tea) and hot water, full of care, wisdom and so many other things that others feel but do not express. I imagine us all together in worship partaking of the table of our Lord and later I imagine the children running behind a ball, others cheering, others drawing their dreams on a piece of paper. Also at the cup of milk, gathered together in the salon sharing Bible stories like our grandparents, fathers and mothers had done. I suddenly smell the aroma of the hot milk on the fire, I open my eyes and I see all the smiles at the table shared by many. While I drink my cup of warm milk I realize what a grand blessing it is to be living all of this and I can feel to some extent the spanning of the distance between those that help us, those who pray and support us: they are present. I am a privileged witness of this wonderful encounter of sisters and brothers that gather together, that share their lives, broach the distances and the differences and together form the "Body of Christ."

I hear the words of the apostle Paul:

" For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26 NRSV)

I hope with these words I have shared something of the significance of myself and work en the Patagonia. Right now I am pastor of the congregation "Hope of the South" in Esquel, the mission in Cushamen and now also of the congregation "Cross of the South" in Bariloche, the challenges are even greater. To be Pastor in three communities is a big responsibility and will show to be a great endeavour. More hours on the road, more work, more tiredness but also more joys, more caring, more encounters, more friendships, more learnings and more moments shared. To all of you I give my thanks for sharing and continuing to follow all of this with me and I count on all of you for what is to come. On top of all this, I am a Pastor of the Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay but I have always felt more like a pastor of the ELCIC and this is how you have made me feel.

May God continue to accompany us and bless this work!

Affectionately;

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