

This series looks at the work of EPES in Chile.

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Dear Friends of EPES,

What uncertain times we are living through. I think of you all and hope you are sheltering at home and staying safe. By now, most of you know that in mid-March the ELCA called all Global Mission personnel home from our countries of service. After in-depth reflection and conversation with EPES staff, family and friends, I decided to return to Minnesota for a period of quarantine with my adult daughters.

During these trying and complicated times, the EPES staff continues to be committed to working for justice, dignity and health. Poorer communities in Chile are being hit the hardest. As we enter the winter months (June to August), we are very worried about the capacity of the public hospitals to take care of people, given that even during a regular winter, the hospital capacity is completely collapsed with seasonal flu and respiratory infections. Sheltering at home presents major challenges for poor communities, since many people don't have the financial resources to buy food and other essential supplies for such a prolonged period of time.

The EPES staff is all connected via video conferencing and continues to meet regularly in our specific areas (executive team, educational team and administrative team). We have been working with community health teams to support them and their families during this time of quarantine. We are helping protect women who are in their homes with abusive partners, working with the Chilean national network to prevent violence against women. We have developed educational materials on mental health, COVID-19, local resources, nutrition, among other topics. We are also working closely with the Haitian immigrant community in El Bosque, producing informational and educational materials in Creole.

I continue meeting with the ELCA Global Mission team for Latin America and the Caribbean as we all work from home exploring and creating new ways



Screenshot of a virtual meeting of the EPES Santiago educational team. Like so many organizations throughout the world, EPES has quickly learned how to work together via Zoom. We meet every Tuesday afternoon to support each other and to plan and coordinate our ongoing work.

to stay connected and to continue our work. **I am not sure when I will be able to return to Chile, Global Mission leadership will be helping us evaluate each situation.**

You are all in my thoughts and prayers and I would be grateful if you would continue to include my family, the EPES staff, the health promoters, the people of Chile and the Global Mission staff of the ELCA in your prayers.

Much love and blessings,

Karen Anderson

ELCA Global Mission Personnel in Chile

HEALTH AND ECONOMY IN CRISIS CHALLENGE CHILE'S NEOLIBERAL STATE

After five months of social mobilization, to which the government responded with brutal repression, Chile began to confront an extremely complex situation after the first case of COVID-19 was detected in early March. President Sebastián Piñera's credibility was so low—81% disapproval rate and with only 6% support—that, at first, many people thought his announcement of the pandemic was a government strategy to end the protest movement.

WORKERS ARE PAYING A HIGH TOLL

The first COVID-19 case in Chile was reported on March 3, 2020. By April 22, there were 11,296 people infected, 309 patients on ventilators and 106 deaths.

As the public health emergency nears two months, the government's priority continues to be protection of large business capital, not workers. The Chilean government granted businesses the possibility of suspending wages to their employees and to have that pay covered by unemployment insurance. The unemployment insurance will pay a maximum of five months, and will draw

COPING WITH COVID-19 IN CHILE

from the workers' own savings, with no contribution from employers.

Consequently, the wealthiest 1%, who accumulate 33% of total earnings and control the country's largest companies, along with multinational corporations that operate in Chile—with governmental complicity—have deprived hundreds of workers and their families of the resources they need to subsist, while they face one of the most devastating global health crises of the last 100 years.

On April 19, President Piñera confirmed Health Minister Jaime Mañalich's decision to declare the country in phase five of the coronavirus pandemic, in order to launch a strategy referred to as "the new normality." This phase calls for gradual reintegration of public employees at their physical workplaces, return to classes in May for school children, and the reopening of large shopping centers and malls. This would take place in the middle of the anticipated peak of infection in the country. Scientists, teachers, health care professionals, unions and students' parents have criticized the government for placing economic interests above people's lives.



EPES REORGANIZES TO HANDLE THE COVID-19 CRISIS

During its 37 years, through courses, workshops, summer schools and other educational events, the EPES Foundation has sought to strengthen organization and mobilization for the right to health of working-class and poor communities. Since the appearance of the first COVID-19 case in Chile, EPES has had to adapt its programs to the new needs of the communities it works with. We have turned to digital communications tools to enable us to talk to each other, while maintaining social distancing to avoid spreading the novel coronavirus. Luckily, while many health promoters don't have computers, everyone has a cell phone and we are all connected by WhatsApp, which can support group calls. It is amazing all that we are learning about communicating virtually.



Drawings by EPES artist Pancho Ramos are being used to generate solidarity and community collaboration during this difficult time. EPES is developing digital graphics that can be accessed on cell phones which is what the majority of people in low-income communities use to communicate.

EPES ACTIVITIES BEFORE THE PANDEMIC (January–March)

INTERNATIONAL COURSE ON POPULAR EDUCATION FOR HEALTH 2020

Nineteen people from Columbia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, Puerto Rico, United States and Chile, participated in the eleventh version of the EPES International Training Program on Popular Education for Health, January 5-15 in Santiago and Concepción. Key support was provided by Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for health workers from Lutheran churches in Guatemala, Peru and Nicaragua.

Since launching the school over a decade ago, 206 people from 25 countries have participated.

Through this course EPES has helped strengthen networks of popular educators throughout Latin America, and communities in several African countries. The International Training, popularly known as the *Escuela (School)*, embodies EPES' commitment to continue to foster community organization and participation in health among grassroots sectors beyond Chile's borders.

VALPARAÍSO WORKSHOPS STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

In January and March, EPES Foundation held three workshops for Neighborhood Health Organizers in the port city of Valparaíso. The workshops, "Approaches and Methodologies for the Promotion and Recovery of Nutritional Health," "Participatory Planning for Community Work," and "Community Leadership," were led by EPES educators Susana Jiles and María Stella Toro.

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS PARTICIPATE IN EPES COURSE IN PUERTO MONTT

The course piloted in Valparaíso was repeated two months later, this time in the southern port city of Puerto Montt. Seventy-four health care professionals and staff of the Network of Primary Care Services of Puerto Montt participated in the course given March 12 and 13 by educators Susana Jiles and Lirayén Reyes.



Nineteen graduates of EPES' eleventh Escuela represented seven countries in the Americas.



Susana Jiles Castillo conducts a seminar in Valparaíso on planning for community work.



Health care professionals of Puerto Montt gain an understanding of ways to promote healthier eating.



Health promoters quarantined at home participate in EPES' sourdough workshop.



Virtual workshop on baking sourdough bread was conducted by EPES staff. Participants baking at home could ask questions in chat form, live on their phones.

GUIDANCE FOR SANTIAGO AND CONCEPCIÓN HEALTH PROMOTERS

EPES is in close contact with the health promotion groups of Santiago and Concepción, offering them support and accompaniment during the public health emergency generated by the COVID-19. We are also providing guidance and training to the Newen Domo Women's Group, which specializes in community and domestic violence prevention, and to the Plant and Harvest community health team, which works on nutrition and food sovereignty issues.

Since the arrival of COVID-19, anxiety and fear have surged among the women EPES works with. This is due to chronic illnesses that affect quite a few women, as well as emotional problems arising from a sense of uncertainty regarding the economic subsistence of their families.

EPES has produced material on COVID-19 prevention and shared it with health promoters. The material includes recommendations for bolstering mental health to help manage quarantine and social isolation. There are also materials that provide contact information about organizations and public offices people can turn to in case of violence against women and children, to receive support, companionship, and legal assistance.



NUTRITION, JUSTICE AND HEALTH PROJECT

EPES continues to provide the nutrition promoters with support and guidance, responding to their needs and interests. Our staff holds weekly self-help virtual meetings featuring relaxation exercises and knowledge exchange related to nutritional sovereignty. We are offering virtual workshops on how to bake sourdough bread, create home vegetable gardens and other things.

EPES has organized virtual meetings with officials of the El Bosque Municipal Health and Education Service, the Healthy Schools Program, and three family clinics (CESFAM), all of which comprise the Intersector Coordinating Board for the Right to Quality and Sustainable Nutrition. This entity, a joint initiative of EPES and the El Bosque Municipal government, is currently designing a communications campaign to safeguard quality and sustainable nutrition locally. The themes will include healthy, low-cost recipes to take full nutritional value of fruit and veggies; recovery of traditional foods such as beans, *cochayuyo* (a seaweed once widely consumed in Chile); tips for better washing and handling of foods; and how to create a home vegetable garden. Additionally, our team is developing collaborative strategies for buying food: co-ops, community market, and other ideas.

"MIGRANTS HAVE A RIGHT TO HEALTH"

Support and solidarity activities are in progress to assist the immigrant community of El Bosque in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic. We remain in close contact with the Union of Haitians for Progress in Chile and with El Bosque Municipality's intercultural facilitators in health.

EPES has distributed information in Creole from other institutions about how to prevent coronavirus infection within the Haitian immigrant community, violence against women and where to go for help.

EPES designed and distributed a Creole notice informing of mandatory quarantine in the El Bosque district, with information on how to request safe-conducts to be able to circulate on public roads.

EPES has conducted ongoing dissemination and made contributions to solidarity campaigns towards the migrant community in Chile. In this period, racism and institutional discrimination towards the migrant population have worsened. The press has replicated the dominant hate speech against migrants in Chile.



EDUCACIÓN POPULAR EN SALUD
POPULAR EDUCATION FOR HEALTH

EPES was created in 1982 to promote health with dignity for the poor through empowerment, mobilization and collective action. It began as a program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) and maintains close ties nationally and internationally with the Lutheran church and is an ELCA Global Mission supported ministry. EPES became an independent, non-profit Chilean foundation in 2002.

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LEARN ABOUT OTHER EPES ACTIVITIES AT:

www.epes.cl or Action for Health in the Americas (AHA): www.actionforhealth.org
or Chile Libre de Tabaco: www.chilelibredetabaco.cl

On Facebook: EPES Fundación; Action for Health in the Americas;
Red Chile Libre de Tabaco.



EPES continues working during the pandemic developing and sharing educational materials and providing direct support to families facing unemployment and hunger during this crisis. Here, health promoters use their cell phones to conduct group meetings with other members of EPES staff while quarantined at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We must take extreme measures to respond to this crisis. But the lesson from our sacred traditions is that these measures, where they align with the basic demands of justice, cannot be temporary. Plague in the Bible is not a storm weathered before a return to normalcy. It's a call to come together in new ways in order to survive, hold the powerful responsible for their unjust policies and the lies they've told to cover up injustice, and rebuild on foundations of love and justice.

– **Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis**
Sojourners, March 18, 2020

TESTIMONIES FROM COMMUNITY HEALTH PROMOTERS LIVING IN QUARANTINE

Most informal and precarious jobs have been suspended. Unemployment continues to mount, striking an especially hard blow to the poorest sectors of society.

"We have been together more than 30 years as a group of health promoters trained by EPES. We meet once a week. The social distancing imposed by the pandemic is really hard on us.

Many health promoters lost their outside employment. There is no law to protect them because they had informal jobs. Now they barely have money to survive. Other women who depended on their husband's wages are also affected because workers are being fired or jobs are temporarily suspended.

We are grateful to EPES for all the informative material and recommendations about taking care of ourselves. It has helped us manage the anxiety, fear and loneliness we feel. We also appreciate the economic support that arrived at the direst moment. With guidance and accompaniment from EPES, we have been able to communicate by video conferences. It has been very moving for all of us to see each other again and to talk, from a distance. This support from EPES has given us much strength. Being together and keeping in contact makes us feel alive again, and has restored our strength."

– **María Carrasco Mella**, Circle of Women for Health



María Carrasco Mella (left) and Susana Henríquez (above) are working from home.

"Since the beginning of the spread of the coronavirus, we have gone through several difficult stages, emotionally. We are very worried for our friends and fellow health promoters suffering from chronic diseases. Some of them are spending quarantine alone in their homes. Personally, I have fibromyalgia and arthrosis, and I need mobility to avoid health problems, which is difficult being inside all the time.

Our health team "Newen Domo" emerged from a course held by EPES and we work in conjunction with EPES to stop violence against women. We are always thankful for the space we have and the training, even more so today in times of crisis. We are in constant contact to support each other, to see if others need medical assistance or have any other need.

We hold regular group meetings by video calls with the accompaniment of EPES. In the present situation we need to keep in touch with the network of other organizations, particularly because violence against women has heightened under quarantine. Our work has centered on promoting self-care and informing people where to turn to or call in case they become a victim of violence."

– **Susana Henríquez Faúndez**, Newen Domo Women's Group