

Dear Mount Hamilton United Church,

¡“Saludos a todo y todas”! Hello to everyone from Chiclayo Peru!

It's about 26 Celsius, the sun is shining bright and there is this summer city feeling in Chiclayo today. I am sitting in the office at Centro Esperanza looking outside at the blue sky and people dressed in sandals, shorts, summer dresses, and buildings with their windows open. I am also imagining what it looks like outside your windows these days!

I have heard that some of you have been asking about what exactly I am up to here. It is really wonderful to know that some of the congregation is interested and I certainly have some answers for you!

I have become significantly more settled into life and work here. As some of you might imagine it is not exactly easy to live outside one's own culture, country and away from family. I have made some wonderful friends and colleagues at Centro Esperanza and in Chiclayo. This has helped me adapt to my new environment more easily. I have my own apartment which I share with Paola. Paola is my age and from another city in the Amazon region of Peru called Tarapoto. We keep each other company and have become good friends. I have become accustomed to public transportation, enjoyed many delicious Peruvian dishes, and have learned how to pay all my bills. I have gotten a little bit more used to people noticing me on the street as a foreigner and getting attention because I look different and talk with a big accent. Now, I have some understanding of how to cope with the attention that I get on the streets and in many situations. I also have felt more and more integrated into the work and life of Centro Esperanza which is absolutely wonderful. My Spanish speaking skills have improved as well. These are just some of the things that have allowed me to feel more adapted to life in Chiclayo. They are major stepping stones that have allowed me to go deeper into this journey and feel grounded doing so.

To give you all an idea of where I am, Chiclayo is the capital city of the province of Lambayeque and has a population of about 738 000.



Chiclayo is about 13 kilometres from the Pacific coast. It is known as “the City of Friendship” because people here are known to be friendly. Not only is it known for its friendliness but also for its commercialized economy and as a centre for trade. Chiclayo was founded in the year of 1835 by the Spanish colonizers. There have been really

significant prehistoric archaeological sites found around Chiclayo from the Pre-Columbian era beginning from 100 AD. Therefore, there were ancient civilizations living here way before the Spanish came to the region. Needless, to say it is very historically rich place to be.

From what I have seen and heard the past months, it seems that many people are saying that Chiclayo's population is rapidly growing like many urban cities in Peru. A lot of people are migrating from rural areas or from other cities where educational or job opportunities are lesser than in Chiclayo. Significantly, with increase in population growth, there is greater pressure on urban development and basic resources. The majority of newcomers have settled in peripheral areas of Chiclayo. These large peripheral parts of the city have been developed by people who live on very low incomes. These areas are called "young towns" or "pueblos juvenes". Therefore, there are large sectors of Chiclayo where people cannot afford access to resources such as potable water, sanitary systems such as flushing toilets, or electricity. Speaking from only what I have seen and heard, Chiclayo has developed large surrounding areas around the core part of the city where the majority of people live on a small amount of resources in comparison to where I live in the centre of the city where the middle to upper class citizens live. Furthermore, in the peripheral part of the city there greater rates of crime and violence. I would say that the majority of Chiclayo's population lives on low incomes because of job shortages, issues of underemployment among other related socio-economic issues in the region.



Centro Esperanza's mission is to promote human development and prioritizes supporting people from the marginalized areas in Chiclayo. Centro Esperanza has a special focus area in Child and Youth Development. This area has undertaken a sponsor child program funded by the Catholic organization Chalice. I am most directly working in the Gender Equity & Violence Prevention focus area at Centro

Esperanza. I work with two other women, Fely and Maria Esther. They have become really good friends and colleagues of mine. They are running a project with teachers in 7 schools. One of the main goals of the project is to promote greater social awareness in elementary school teachers. We accompany study groups facilitated by the teachers themselves. They discuss topics such as; human rights, political advocacy for the improvement in education, non-violent disciplinary strategies, working with parents, and the upcoming theme this year

will be promoting equality and equity in elementary schools and in society. There are about 80 teachers participating in this project in Chiclayo. I am helping them out with the administrative aspects of the project. I am learning about the issues that teachers have to face in the educational system and in the present socio-economic reality in their communities.



I am also helping facilitate a women's discussion group called a "women's circle" here. The group of women who participate in the circle are from very low income households. Fely and I make sure that the women first identify topics that are relevant to their lives or that they would like to explore. After they identify these topics, we organize workshops, activities, and discussion time according to their needs, ideas, and suggestions. This women's circle has become really special to me. I have felt really grateful for the opportunity to get to know these women. Here, among many other aspects of my work, I am learning about women's hopes, dreams, struggles, and the diverse lives that they lead. The other day we talked about what it feels like to be a woman. Afterwards, we put on music and started dancing with colourful scarves that I brought. We laughed and cried and afterwards we danced. It was such a memorable moment for me and I hope for them as well.

Another aspect of my work right now is to support the Gender Equity & Violence Prevention area's development of project proposals and their search for financing of these projects. Recently, we have been given the opportunity to develop a small 6 month project. The project's objective is to raise awareness about non-violent discipline and about the impacts of family violence and gender violence on girls, boys, women and men and on our communities. This project will be carried out with two family groups that Centro Esperanza has supported over many years. The project will start up in March.

I hope that gives you an idea at least of what I am doing here, the context I live and serve in, and a little bit about what I am learning about. I would like to mention that there are many ways that you can follow me during the next year. I send the United Church of Canada "Letters from Overseas" and they are posted on the United Church website. I should be sending a new letter during this month. The link is [www.united-church.ca/communications/overseas](http://www.united-church.ca/communications/overseas) . I am also tweeting from Peru for those of you who know what this is! Go online and follow me! My

*Twitter* name is **sarahinPeru**. There also is a website where all UCC Overseas Personnel put up their photos. The website is called Smugmug and the United Church Smugmug page is called **unitedchurch.smugmug.com**. Here you can see my journey with your own eyes!

Last but not least, I had a really wonderful opportunity to talk with the women's group at Mount Hamilton. Thank you so much to all those women for their interest and all their wonderful questions that they had for me. It was a true gift to be able to speak with other Canadian women about my new life and work experiences in Chiclayo. I hope that we can arrange another time for us to talk again soon! If any other group at Mount Hamilton would like to arrange a time to talk that would be more than welcome as well!

May the Spirit of Justice, Peace, & Love be with you all,

Sarah