



Bolivia 2016

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM BOLIVIA

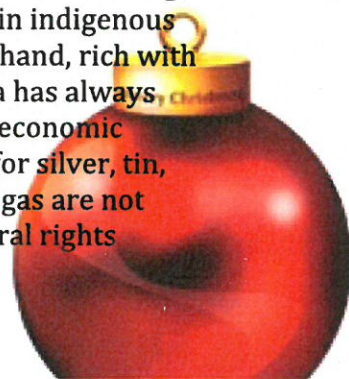
Dear family, friends and church community,

This December Leidy and I will complete eleven months in Bolivia! By now we are well into our MCC term as the facilitators of the young adult volunteer program, Seed. Bolivia has welcomed us with open arms as we continue to discover the cultural diversity around us as well as contextual issues that illuminate the variety of worldviews that collide together in the Andes Mountains. In Cochabamba we see the diversity when walking from the flashy movie theatre to Bolivia's largest open market where Quechua speaking women are selling produce and wears from the surrounding mountains and *chuño* is a staple of every dish. Leidy and I have much to be thankful for and are delighted to be able to share our stories and experiences with you.

The biggest accomplishment Leidy and I have had with MCC this year was receiving seven young adults who have now embarked on a two-year service term. We conducted a six-week orientation during which the *Seeders*

were introduced to MCC Bolivia, completed their language study and learned as much as they could about Bolivian culture, context and history before being sent out to their service placements. The volunteers come from Honduras, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Canada and the United States and are serving in a variety of areas such as working with at-risk children, alternative-sustainable agriculture, urban gardening, and water contamination.

One of the themes we addressed during the orientation was trying to understand the different paths Bolivia seems to be going down. On the one hand, as a pluri-national state, the country recognizes 32 different indigenous nationalities that exist within the national borders. With this recognition, comes an expectation of supporting the cultural practices of community oriented living and subsistence farming in indigenous rural areas. On the other hand, rich with natural resources, Bolivia has always been exploited by global economic markets whose demand for silver, tin, gold, lithium and natural gas are not concerned with the cultural rights



nor the autonomy of indigenous peoples. How should Bolivia address these very different perspectives and ways of building a nation?

The work of MCC partners in sustainable and community agriculture reflect these converging forces and partners have found creative ways to take advantage of this nexus. While global development has made it difficult for small, family farms to survive by selling common produce such as potatoes, these farmers come together to discover niches within their local markets for alternative products. One example are cookies made out of the common Andean tuber, oca. While this produce does not have much value on the international market, farming associations have found that local schools will purchase these cookies for their lunches. This is one of several examples of local innovation in the face of unforgiving economic forces.

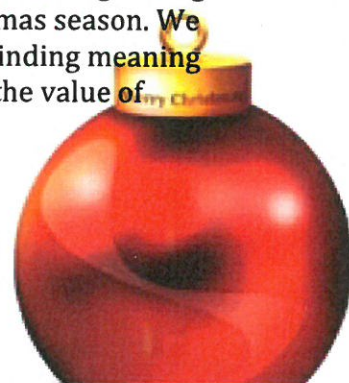
As the year is coming to an end, Bolivia is facing two urgent issues around water and violence against women. Towards the end of November, the president of Bolivia declared a national emergency in the face of significant water shortages in major cities. Rationing water supplies has resulted in residents of certain neighborhoods only having access to water during certain hours of the day. While protests and riots have made the issue more visible, public officials are not taking the problem seriously. Many issues such as climate change, use of water for mining and lack of public funds made available for a viable solution come together in trying to understand the root causes of this crisis.

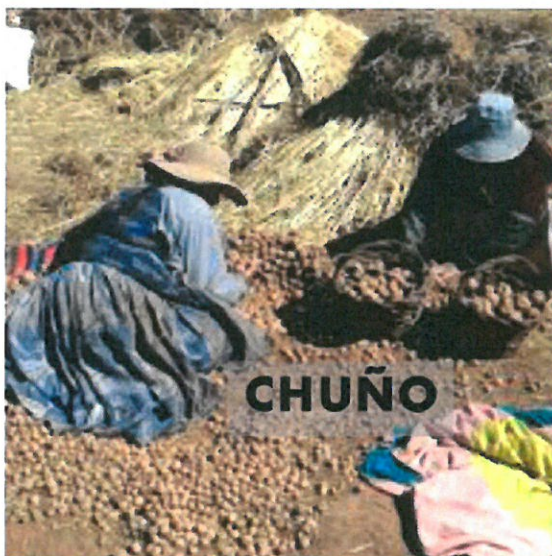
On November 25, Leidy and I participated in a march to draw attention to the high levels of violence against women in Bolivia. Declared by the United Nations as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, several organizations marched in the major cities of Bolivia to recognize the violence and impunity for most offenders. While Bolivia has laws to protect women, there is a lack of resources and political will to carry out these laws and hold offenders accountable. MCC sees the impact of violence against women through our partners that work with victims of sexual violence and children that come from homes with high levels of domestic violence.

In the midst of these contextual issues, Leidy and I understand the importance of finding time to enjoy Bolivia and discover the beauty of the *pluri*-national state. Last week we attended a parade celebrating the musical and cultural diversity through dance and very intricate and colorful suits and costumes. The following day, the entire city closed its roads to traffic so that people could walk and bicycle across town. The streets were packed with people, food stands and music groups providing free entertainment. We are delighted to be in Bolivia, learning new perspectives of how to see the world.

Leidy and I send you our greetings and blessings this Christmas season. We hope you all are as well finding meaning in life's endeavours and the value of family and community.

God bless you,
Leidy & Nathan

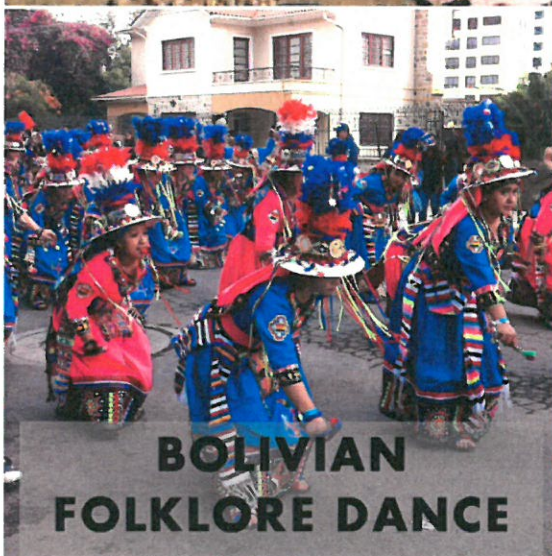




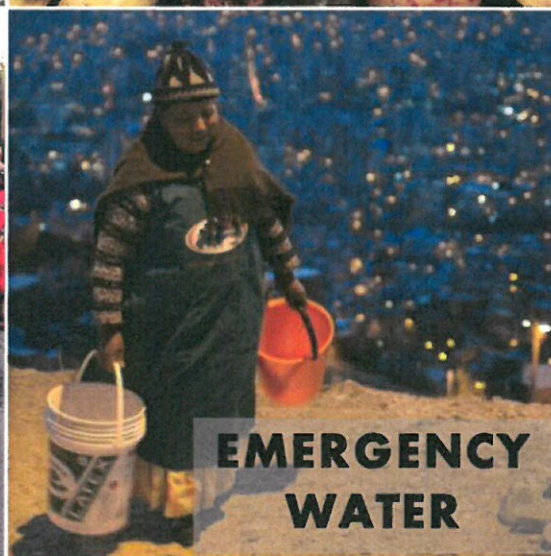
CHUÑO



OCA



**BOLIVIAN
FOLKLORE DANCE**



**EMERGENCY
WATER**

