

This series looks at the work of EPES in Chile.

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CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF EPES' WORK FOR JUSTICE, DIGNITY AND HEALTH

Gratitude for the achievements of the past, inspiration for the challenges to come

Four decades after its humble beginnings, EPES celebrated its 40th anniversary on Saturday, November 26th in Santiago, Chile. Joining us were some 250 local and international supporters, first and second generation health promoters, international school alumni, local partner organizations, visiting and local Lutheran church representatives, the local mayor and district congresswoman and EPES' original team and current and former staff. The turnout made visible the depth and diversity of EPES' achievements and evolution since its founding in 1982. EPES began its work as a team of four during the military dictatorship with a vision of justice and dignity in health using popular education methods that are the hallmark of its training method.

The anniversary program used those same popular education tools to present the panorama of its work over the past four decades. EPES staff and health promoters past and present created a skit for each decade around a theme synthesizing the work and aspirations for each. For example, the theme for the 80s was, "Building community capacity: health is a right," and for the 90s, "Community action to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic," and so on.

Health promoters from Santiago and Concepción spoke about the impact of EPES' training and collective action on their lives and families, and renewed their commitment to working in their local communities for health and dignity for all.

EPES received greetings from friends around the world. The first was a video message from Dr. Grace Mose, founder of the Hope Foundation for African Women in Kenya, and members of her team, many of whom attended the EPES' International Training Program.

An especially energetic greeting came from a delegation from the Las Cañas Community Center in Valparaíso, also graduates of EPES International Training Program, which made gala of their street theater programs to get the crowd dancing and clapping.



Founding team with 1980s banner Building community capacity: Health is a Right



Recalling the 1990s Candlelight Memorials held every May to remember lives lost to AIDS, health promoters and EPES staff enter with candles and singing.



A greeting from community health promoters was brought by Pamela Monsalve (Concepción) and Valeria García (Santiago).



Greeting from Mauricio Salazar, Las Cañas Community Center leader and EPES International Training Program graduate.

The presentation closed with the affectionate words of Rev. Rafael Malpica, Director of the ELCA's Service and Justice Division. He linked EPES' work in education to a long legacy of Latin American educators. Other representatives of the Lutheran church attending the event (and leading thanksgiving ceremonies earlier in the week), were Rev. Marco Garrido and Gustavo Driau, ELCA Regional Representative for South America.

EPES current staff surprised the organization's founding team—made up of Karen Anderson, Rosario Castillo, María Eugenia Calvin and Christina Mills—with gifts symbolizing growth and collective leadership, in appreciation for their 40 years of dedicated and committed work. It is worth noting that all four original team members continue to work with EPES, with 3 of the 4 in leadership roles in the Santiago office and the 4th as president of the board of EPES' US counterpart, Action for Health in the Americas (AHA).

The celebration took place in the Victor Jara Cultural Center in La Cisterna, a neighborhood close to where EPES has worked for decades. Mayor, Joel Olmos, and the Senator Claudia Pascual Grau showed their support by attending. And true to EPES tradition original music was heard throughout the event, provided by Bandita La Inquieta, singer-songwriter Sebastián Arancibia (son of an EPES-trained health promoter), and an incredible concert of Colombian Caribbean-inspired music and dance from the visiting troupe Flor de Guayaba, long-time friends of the EPES center in Concepción.



Rev. Rafael Malpica closed with affectionate words.



Greeting from the Huerteras (community gardeners): Without seeds, land and water there is no healthy life.



Audience at the La Cisterna's Victor Jara Cultural Center Rev. Marco Garrido from the IELCH, Gustavo Driau, ELCA Regional Representative South America, Rev. Dr. Rafael Malpica, Executive Director of Service and Justice Division of the ELCA and Chilean Senator Claudia Pascual Gra.



Flor de Guayaba music and dance group got everyone dancing.



Founding Team, María Eugenia Calvin, Karen Anderson, Rosario Castillo, and Christina Mills, with 40th Anniversary Cake.



Sonia Covarrubias (Executive Director of EPES) and Hernan Fuentes (good friend of EPES), emceed the evening: Mayor Joel Olmos shares a greeting and recognition of EPES; Camila Jorquera, Las Cañas Community Center, thanks EPES for always being there during difficult times; and singer-songwriters Claudia Stern and Cecilia Concha Laborde present the video clip of the song, Nunca Más Mujer, written in a workshop sponsored by EPES and facilitated by Holly Near.



EPES staff on stage closing the anniversary celebration enthusiastically singing with the audience Victor Jara's song, "The Right to Live in Peace."

With Chile at a crossroads, EPES celebrated 40 years of radical hope and solidarity for enduring change. This vision was renewed as companions spanning generations, borders, professions and faiths shared their songs and stories, recounted their struggles, and nourished their spirits with gratitude and love.

As part of its 40th anniversary celebration, EPES welcomed a delegation of friends from the United States and Canada to come to Chile and engage with the work of community partners in Santiago, Valparaíso and Concepción.

Journalist Chris May, a member of the delegation, shares his impressions of their week-long visit, below:

NEW PRESIDENTS, OLD CONSTITUTIONS AND 40 YEARS OF EVOLUTION AND EMPOWERMENT

Among the first stops for the international delegation was Barrio Yungay, a funky mural-strewn neighborhood in Santiago that recently became the home of Chile's new president, Gabriel Boric. The first president in many decades to eschew the opulent and secluded mansions of past national leaders, Boric lives down the street from a record shop and a corner store where locals say he can be spotted picking up bread in the mornings.

As an organization born in the throes of a brutal dictatorship, with a commitment to address socioeconomic forces that negatively impact human health, EPES was among the many social organizations that supported Boric's promotion of constitutional reform. Those hopes for transformation were dashed after a national plebiscite failed to replace the current system: a constitution imposed by the dictatorship, born from blood and violence.

IN VALPARAISO & CONCEPCIÓN

In Valparaíso, the "City of Hills," we met with youth organizers at Las Cañas Community Center, which has served as a vital community space for mutual aid during disasters over the past two decades. The young leaders expressed their gratitude to EPES for years of accompaniment and support. More recently, the Center received a government grant to expand its work and renovate its facilities by partnering with local workers and artists who prioritize locally sourced raw materials.

"Our organization has always been linked to art, culture, and children," said Mauricio Salazar, a graduate of EPES' International Training Program, who was a child when he began his involvement in reclaiming the previously neglected space on behalf of the community where he grew up.



International delegation learns about EPES – Roberto Werckle, Chris May (who shares his impressions here), Melanie Nelson and Carla Olson.





Outside the Auco Community Center and garden in El Bosque on Nov. 21 following the testimonies of health promoters and the collaborative presentations between health groups and the international delegation.

In Concepción, EPES team members led by Dr. Lautaro Lopez made a presentation on the geography, history, culture, politics and economics of the Biobío region. The top issues affecting the population were shared, including earthquakes, industrial pollution, unemployment, poverty, and mental health—all problems exacerbated by the pandemic.

The presentation highlighted EPES' interventions: immediate responses after the 2010 earthquake and a long-term reconstruction process; mental health workshops for caregivers of bereaved persons; support for community kitchens amid pandemic-induced hunger; community gardens, food sovereignty and agroecology; workshops on making natural healing products using medicinal plants and on prevention of violence against women; promoting women's leadership development; health as a right and not a privilege; and participation in local, regional and national networks/coalitions.

GIVING THANKS & DEMANDING JUSTICE

Hymns, traditional Chilean music, circle dancing, and Chile's famed empanadas—these were among the delights waiting for those who participated in an intimate and heartfelt Thanksgiving Day program. Community hugs, radical hope, mutual respect, and forty years of popular education—these were among the blessings that animated an evening of testimony filled with laughter, passion, tears and gratitude.

The week was not only about expressing gratitude—it was also about continuing to organize around demands for a more just world, free from gender-based violence, abuse and discrimination. To celebrate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, EPES and partner groups took to the streets of Santiago, joining a global chorus with an unyielding demand: lives free from gender-based violence.

HONORING THE PAST, CONFRONTING THE PRESENT, EMBRACING THE FUTURE

Along with visiting Santiago's Museum of Memory and Human Rights and learning about notorious former sites of imprisonment, interrogation and torture, the group also visited the Cementerio General to pay a somber tribute at monuments dedicated to those who were disappeared, tortured and murdered during decades of dictatorial repression and political violence under the military dictatorship of Pinochet.

In addition to a showcase highlighting decades of work from Santiago-based health groups, the delegation viewed murals made by the Llaleta group in the community of San Ramón. Images of smiling Chileans with raised fists and missing eyes provided a bittersweet reminder of the courage and sacrifices that manifested during the social uprising that led to Chile's unsuccessful constitutional reform effort, in which over 400 people lost all or part of their sight, deliberately targeted by police rubber bullets.



Gathering to give thanks for EPES' 40 years of work for justice, health and dignity.



President Pablo Rios and Bishop Izani Bruch of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chile (IELCH) bring greetings at the thanksgiving gathering.



International delegation visiting Chile's Museum of Memory and Human Rights.

EPES 40TH ANNIVERSARY PLAYLIST

Music has always been a vital part of the lives and social movements of people around the world, and Chile is no exception. The following songs, featured throughout EPES' 40th anniversary events, reflect a long tradition of expressing political and social consciousness through music with strong political and social themes.

Gracias a la Vida – Violeta Parra

El Pueblo que Camino por el Mundo – Juan Antonio Espinosa

El Derecho de Vivir en Paz – Víctor Jara

Yo te Nombro Libertad – based on a poem by Paul Éluard

Solo le Pido a Dios – León Gieco

Razón de Vivir – Víctor Heredia

Nunca Más Mujer – Claudia Stern, Cecilia Concha Laborde, Jacqueline Castro, Christele Durandy (written in a workshop sponsored by EPES and facilitated by Holly Near)

No Me Voy a Callar – Flor de Guayaba

Bellamar – Bandita La Inquieta



La Bandita
la Inquieta



Rev. Marco Garrido
and Sebastián Arancibia



Flor de Guayaba

FAREWELL TO REV. RAFAEL MALPICA

Rev. Rafael Malpica-Padilla, Executive Director of the Service and Justice Division of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), has walked with EPES for most of its four decades of existence. His presence at this anniversary event was one of his last activities prior to his imminent retirement. The EPES team expressed their deep appreciation to Rev. Malpica for his support throughout the years and presented him with a "retirement kit" with Chilean games to play during retirement, a journal in which to write his memoirs and a crèche made by a Chilean artist.



Earlier in the year, Rev. Malpica recorded a video message for EPES' 40th anniversary in which he said:

On behalf of our Church, I wish to extend a warm greeting to the EPES staff and participants for their 40 years of ministry and transformational service in communities throughout Chile, as well as their work in training people to serve their neighborhoods and sister churches in Latin America and other parts of the world. Thank you for your service.

EPES has brought us a methodology that can give our church the capability of transforming the world. EPES' work has impacted communities. It has also impacted churches and us personally by opening our eyes to the possibility of a different world. It has given us tools to truly address the most pressing issues that affect our communities, so as to enable their transformation and enable everyone to live in a world of justice.



REV. DR. RAFAEL MALPICA PADILLA
Director Ejecutivo de la División Servicio y Justicia, ELCA

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

Puerto Rican health educator Aurinés Torres Sánchez, a University of Puerto Rico Medical School professor and participant in EPES 2nd International Training Course returned to Santiago to present in person a special greeting from training course alumni. She compared EPES to biological networks known as mycelium, trees and their roots, seeking out and nourishing the trees that most need healing.

"I believe that EPES is like mycelium, interconnecting organizations around the world. EPES isn't the only mycelium network out there, but it's a very important one."

EPES International Training Program has introduced its popular education methods to health workers, church workers and community activists in 25 countries across Latin America and as far away as the USA, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Madagascar.



GREETING FROM HEALTH PROMOTION GROUPS

Dear friends,

Warm greetings for each one of you who comprise this marvelous, committed human group that is EPES. We are happy, caring, freedom-loving, rebellious women of conscience. We are tall, short, skinny, fat, young and old.

We congratulate you for “keep on keeping on” over 40 years, and we’re here to celebrate with you. These have been years of much work, worries, sadness, but also joy. Today we are grateful to EPES for having entered our lives, and become part of our history and memory.

We are grateful for the revolutionary and visionary rebelliousness of Karen, Charo (Rosario), Christina and Coné (María Eugenia) who were instrumental in helping us bring about important changes in our lives. And not just our lives, but that of our families and our neighborhoods.

So many members of the EPES team in Santiago and Concepción have stood with us over 40 years; first during our training, and then throughout our trajectories as health promoters. We have walked, marched and run together, with you not ahead or behind us, but alongside us, as friends and partners.

You taught us to look at our reality and analyze it from the standpoint of our context and situation. From you we learned that we must give meaning to life in everything we do. We learned that things do not necessarily have to stay the way they are, and that dignity is something that is built. We learned to question. We learned not to accept things as they are but to get mad, and how anger can mobilize us.

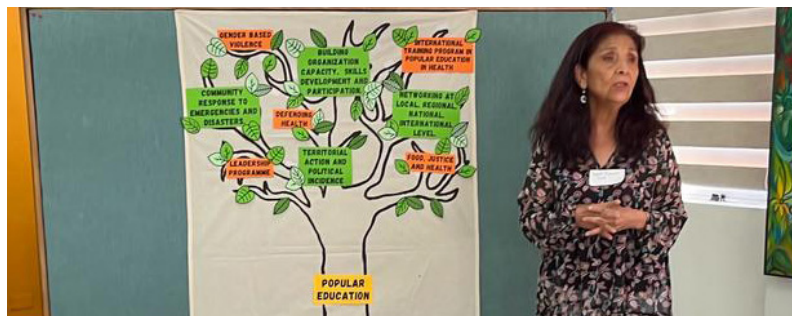
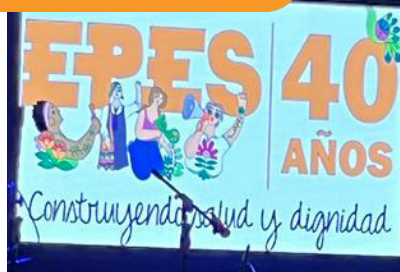
We learned that our poverty is caused by exploitation, abuse, and social inequality. We learned to fight for our rights. We learned that inside every one of us is a patch of sky that is also a part of the universe and from where we can draw hope for a better world.

We are from the Circle of Women, the David Werner Health Group, Newen Domo, Llaleta, Sow and Harvest group, the community gardeners of Concepción and Santiago, health promoters of Hualpén, and women of the Penco Health and Environmental Group.

We are grateful to you because you took the first step with us. And that first step has enabled us to see.

Gracias and God Bless

Community health teams trained by EPES



Maria Eugenia of the EPES Santiago staff presenting EPES' current projects, underlying themes, key methodologies and institutional grounding.



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.

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.

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