

Dear Family and Friends,

Since we let you know about our family mission trip to Southern Brazil, we wanted to give you a recap. I'll try to be brief, but that's not my forte. We packed a lot into the two weeks we were there!

Travel: Overall, great! The kids loved their first time flying, the individual screens, and even the food. They fared better than the parents on the sleep front. Praise God no luggage was lost either way and no problems at security (had to go through it for 5 out of our 6 flights)! Abe was fascinated with the whole airport process - I think he's got it down!

Accommodations: We stayed at the guest house right on the Chain of Love campus. We were welcomed with a "snack" (a small meal) and some basics stocked in our fridge and pantry. We had everything we needed. We had normal appliances (except a dishwasher, but we hardly ate at home), but had to adjust to not putting toilet paper in the toilets (there were a few "oops" moments), and only cold water from the tap (except showers and the kitchen sink). We had a translator with us for our formal activities and when we visited each of the 10 houses for a meal. They provided all our transportation and went the extra mile to help us get a football (soccer) jersey for Abe! Almost all our meals were provided either at the staff lunch (we paid for those meals) or by one of the house families. We had a schedule before we arrived, but there were many changes to it throughout our time there.

Culture: Brazilians are loving, hospitable, and affectionate! We got so many hugs and kisses on our cheeks! Doing a "thumbs up" is their version of our wave. Driving is similar, but add motorcycles weaving in and out, and stop signs are merely suggestions. There are regular speed bumps because otherwise people don't follow the speed limit (so we were told). A few other things we noticed: the napkins were small, the paper products are thin, police cars always have their lights flashing, it's required to have your headlights on when driving on highways, and almost everyone loves soccer!

Houseparents: The houseparents are selfless, joyful, patient, imperfect, called by God to this ministry, and rely on the Holy Spirit working through them to handle the challenges of caring for up to 12 children and teens. Please remember them in your prayers. The dads have regular jobs, and the moms are home. They have a helper 8-5 on weekdays to help keep up with the cooking, cleaning, and laundry for households of up to 15 people! One couple has served for over 23 years, and another just started while we were there because they had to open a new house!

The Kids at COL: They are wonderful! They are respectful, helpful, affectionate, and have all sorts of personalities! Many were eager to spend time with us and would stop by the guest house (usually looking for one of our kids). They eagerly participated in the activities we brought. Their backgrounds and ages and challenges are quite diverse: some were neglected or abused, some were born addicted to drugs, some have cognitive limitations, some likely have autism or ADHD, some have anger issues; but they are all made in the image of God, and they are loved and cared for by the houseparents and staff at Chain of Love so well. Some of the stories of transformation we heard were remarkable! Chain of Love received 25 children in the month of July. While I'm thankful they are in a wonderful place now, their placement by the judicial system likely means they came from abuse or neglect. Meeting and spending time with our family's sponsored child, Jhon, was so special to all of us! He is the sweetest young man!

Activities: We had two sessions of the same activity since the kids go to school either in the morning or the afternoon. We did scratch art to demonstrate how God can take away our sin and reveal the beauty of who He created us to be underneath. We shared the Gospel using the wordless book (black = sin, red = Jesus's blood, white = Christ's righteousness cleansing our sins, green = growth in our relationship with Jesus, gold = Heaven), and then let the kids design their own t-shirt, reminding them to think of what the colors represent as they worked. For loom knitting, we shared that our lives can sometimes feel like a

knotted-up mess that's impossible to untangle, but that God can turn something messy into something beautiful. Joanna was our expert for the actual knitting - many people were asking for her help at the same time, and she handled it wonderfully! We also talked about thankfulness one day and had the kids write thank-you cards. We had some informal activities, too - Spirograph was a hit! There are some things we'd do differently next time, but overall God's truths were communicated and the kids were engaged.

Special Events: Joel met with the housedads. He encouraged them in their important role as fathers and they all paired up and prayed for one another. I met with the teenage girls. I talked about finding our identity in Christ, and shared that not doing that can result in different challenges for each of us, and for me one of those challenges is comparison. The next day, one of the girls had shared with her counselor that she was glad she's not the only one who struggles. I also got to share about Moms in Prayer with the housemoms and pray with them. Joel preached during the Saturday evening chapel service. He clearly communicated the hope of the Gospel and the difference it can make in your life. Telmo also suggested I teach the housemoms how to make applesauce, so we made 3 giant pots together the day before we left! Hearing their laughter as we worked was a blessing, knowing all the responsibilities and challenges these moms have.

Food: The food is delicious but doesn't have strong or crazy flavors. We got authentic Brazilian barbecue four times! :D They eat four times a day: a small breakfast (coffee, bread, cheese), a big lunch (meat, rice and beans, vegetables, potato or noodle salad, fruit, dessert), have "coffee" around 4 or 5 (bread, meat, cheese, cake, hot chocolate, popcorn, leftover chicken....really, it's a small meal), and then have supper around 8pm (maybe an empanada-type food called pastels or sandwiches). We tried pizza with chicken hearts, and another kind with French Fries. They love Guarana, a Fanta-like soda. Their coffee is strong! They also have friendship tea, called chimarrão (SHEEM-a-how). It looks like a cup of dried, shredded grass that they squirt hot water in, then use a metal straw to drink. Once all the liquid is gone, they squirt in more hot water and pass it to their guests or friends. Most of us loved it! (We quickly got over the germ factor.)

Sightseeing: We got to take a day off to visit Gramado, a German city in the mountains. It was busy (winter break for school there) but beautiful! We ate at a delicious buffet and got to try all sorts of new foods (one of my favorites was the fried cheese - not breaded, crispy on the outside but still gooey on the inside). We saw the distinct German architecture, and even caught a little bit of a cultural festival featuring very colorful, live musical and dance performances. We snagged a few souvenirs and some of their famous chocolate! We also visited a Catholic church that overlooks the city, and had our evening meal at a lovely cafe where we got to try a Brazilian cheeseburger, and Telmo ordered a sausage in a bun with ketchup for Maris to replicate a hot dog.

Donations: We received more than was needed to cover the cost of the supplies we brought, so we were able to use the rest of the funds to purchase pizza for the housedads and teen girls events, cake for the housemoms, Portuguese Bibles so that every child who comes to COL receives one, and even tickets for all the kids to attend a local circus! They don't get to do things like that very often, so it was a treat for all of us! (We got to go, too.)

Weather: It downpoured the day we arrived, but then it stayed clear for the first week or so but was cool - probably 60s during the day, but there is no heat in the houses, so we wore layers. And it was normal for everyone to wear their coats, hats, and scarves inside. It warmed up and we had a few 80-degree days! There were a few sprinkles and cloudy days mixed in, but overall it was perfect! I love that there are flowers still in bloom in their winter. It got very, very humid! The dishes wouldn't air dry.

Here are some highlights from each of us...

Joel: Playing soccer with some of the teenage boys and one of the housedads in the gym one Sunday evening. It was so cool to see their skills and passion for the game up close. I'm glad they let me and Abe play with them. Another was seeing children light up when Telmo would give them a few moments of his attention and affection. Another was times of prayer with COL staff, house parents, and children.

Holly: I loved sharing about Moms in Prayer with the housemoms and hearing their heartfelt prayers for the children in their care. Even though I couldn't understand what they were saying, it brought me tears of joy! I'm also thankful for our conversations with the houseparents, to learn about their joys and challenges, how God called them, and how we can better pray for them.

Abe: One of my memories from Brasil was coloring a monkey with Victor in house 2. Something I learned is that you don't need to know a language to have fun.

Joanna: Brazil was so awesome! I have so many memories of that trip. The overall memory of that trip though was when we handed out the gift bags, just the look on their faces when they were opened 'um. They were things we would just smile at and say "thank you!" but they, it's impossible to explain their excitement they had. I think that our presences was a blessing itself.

Maris: I liked going on the planes and that we were next to a playground. I love my new friends and I wanted to stay with them. I'm glad we got to go to all of the houses.

We are so very grateful for your prayer and financial support! This trip would not have been possible without it. Lord willing, we hope to serve at Chain of Love again!

In Christ, Joel, Holly, Abe, Joanna, and Maris Molascon



Our family at a scenic overlook in the area



A typical lunch



Hanging out with House 3



Joel preaching (with a translator)



Scratch Art Activity



The Guest House



Gift bag items for the kids



Joanna enjoying chimarrão



Authentic Brazilian Barbecue