

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned”

MATTHEW 4:16

Transformation

Not long ago I visited the section of Concepción, Chile’s second largest city, where the Bio Bio River, one of the largest rivers in Chile, flows into the Pacific Ocean. It is a beautiful place with a new avenue following the curves of the banks and a river walk jeweled with green parks and spaces for picnics near modern playgrounds. How this community has changed since I first visited nearly ten years ago!



ELENA HUEGEL

Back then, it was a neighborhood of despair, a squatters’ community where homeless people coming into the city looking for jobs used tin, wood, cardboard or whatever else they could find in the dump to build a makeshift shanty on abandoned government property. Whenever the river flooded beyond its banks, it washed away the makeshift houses. When the water receded, the people kept coming back. When the government tried to eject them from the land, they refused to leave, and managed to hold onto these homes they had eked out of nothing.

Today, I stand in a tiny apartment with running water and cheery curtains. It belongs to a family who once lived in a cardboard-walled and tin-roofed shack. They are long-time members of the Pentecostal Church of Chile. In this modest, little church they discovered something of value in themselves and each other. With laughter and tears, they speak of the slow, but steady, transformation from the dark fear of streets run by drug lords to kites, bikes, and soccer games. Their tiny congregation has been a light in the middle of the darkness, and continues to be a beacon of God’s life-giving power.

Elena Huegel is a Global Ministries missionary with the Pentecostal Church of Chile. She serves as an environmental and Christian education specialist.

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