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Fundación Pro Humanae Vitae  
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**Argentina.** Even after living in this great country for over two months, I am still struck by a certain sense of awe and curiosity at the sound of its name. Given the richness of its history, the diversity of its culture, and the beauty of its land, I doubt one will ever cease to be amazed by all that one has to learn about Argentina. This summer I was blessed with the opportunity, coordinated by Notre Dame's Kellogg Institute and international non-profit agency Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD), to intern with a human-rights NGO in La Plata, Argentina. During my short nine-week stay with Fundación Pro Humanae Vitae (FPHV), I learned just how far the efforts of a small number of people, working together in a humble, two-room office, can truly go to touch upon the lives of the community in a grand way.

*"Promocionar y desarrollar integralmente al hombre, generando igualdad de accesos y oportunidades."* This is the central mission of Fundación Pro Humanae Vitae, a group of dedicated volunteers tied together by overpowering belief in the equal development of the human person in every sense of the word – economic, social, cultural, political, moral. Founded by Sra. Graciela Sánchez in 1995, the Fundación supports numerous community development programs in the La Plata-Buenos Aires locale, working alongside universities, businesses, and municipal-provincial governments to develop and realize public initiatives. Within my first few days as a member of the FPHV family, I came to the realization of how ample the field of human rights work truly is. FPHV is not an organization that focuses solely on the well-being of one particular demographic, in one particular place or time. It is, rather, an institution dedicated to serve the needs of the community, whether in the form of organizing conferences for university students, workshops for small-business owners, Christmas recitals for children, outdoor programs for

incarcerated persons, or exhibition fairs for local artisans. Despite having spent two months at the Fundación, I still do not fully grasp the immense community reach of this great organization and its university, business, and governmental counterparts.

During my second week at FPHV, I traveled with my supervisor Rafael Velázquez and my co-worker Marcelo Fernández to Santa Maria Magdalena, a neighborhood comedor located on the outskirts of the city. After the military-political instability during the late 70s and early 80s, and especially after the economic crisis of 2001, Argentina saw the rise of countless comedors, which serve as local kitchens and community centers, providing primarily for young children when they are not in school. Santa Maria Magdalena is just one of numerous comedors which supervises and nurtures the well-being of young lives each day. There we met with the director of the comedor, a woman by the name of Graciela de Cabañas. Graciela told us of the constant struggle to meet the demands of the neighborhood, balancing the everyday nutritional and social schedules of some 100 children with limited resources. Together, we decided to undertake the construction and realization of a sewing workshop in the backyard of the comedor so as to achieve some measure of self-sufficiency. With such an undertaking, as I was told by Graciela Sánchez, “the comedor would not have to be so dependent on government donations. The people are poor because the government dependence keeps them poor. They need change. They need something sustainable.”

To that effect, my specific project as an intern within FPHV was to head a committee of my co-workers in organizing a benefit tea, the proceeds from which were dedicated to the construction of the Maria Magdalena clothing workshop and the purchase of sewing machines. This line of work demanded constant open and effective communication with my peers, my supervisor, the mothers at the comedor, and all of those invited, as well as those organizations

who so generously dedicated their services to the cause. With the help of local businesses and government entities including Universitas, a group of culinary students, and the Commercial Center of La Plata, as well as with the charity of the invitees, we raised sufficient funds to help our friends at the comedor achieve some level of self-realization. During my last visit to the comedor, Graciela de Cabañas related to me the story of five local boys, abandoned by the state after their mother was taken to jail to complete her sentence. These boys have no guidance, no direction in their life. They subsist only on the nourishment provided by the comedor. It is my sincere hope that, through FPHV's charity drive, I have indirectly touched the lives of these boys, even if in the smallest of ways. I hope that by providing more for the comedor in terms of self-sufficiency, we give each community member who benefits from the comedor something more as well.

In addition to my work with the benefit tea, I attended bi-weekly meetings with the other FPHV volunteers to discuss the organization's grandest undertaking, the renovation of an abandoned community building on the outskirts of the city into a new cultural, social, and educational center. The realization of this large project, rightfully called Vitae Polis, will be the pinnacle of the Fundación's mission, the exemplar of its focused efforts. Unfortunately, during my brief stint with the Fundación, I did little more with respect to this project other than to brainstorm ideas and finalize the details of the project in the form of an situational analysis report, which, at the time of my departure, was to be presented to the leaders of several important institutions, including both the provincial bank and government. I did begin an English translation of this lengthy report during my last week in office in preparation for this September, when my supervisor Rafael Velázquez will pitch his idea to American companies in hopes of the receipt of financial backing. Unfortunately, I did not finish the translation by the time of my

departure from Argentina, but the task will be continued by another FSD intern placed with the Fundación.

Overall, my internship experience truly opened my eyes to the world beyond U.S. borders. Although I think I'd be grossly exaggerating if I were to say that I truly changed the field of human rights and economic development work in a wonderfully deep and meaningful way, I do like to think that, for some, I lent my hand in the everyday struggle that is finding the road to social equality. From my office and my co-workers, I received constant practice with my Spanish, integral project support, as well as the most genuine insight into some of the most deeply divisive and interesting issues of Argentine politics, education, sports, and culture. From me, my organization received a new outlook on some of the simplest aspects of foreign policy regarding work ethic, time management, and organizational skills, as well as daily amicable discussion of American stereotypes and prejudices as construed by the media (there were many examples).

Most notably, what I will take away from my internship experience is not only an enhanced set of personal and professional skills, but also new perspectives on political, social, economic, cultural, and moral matters. During my brief stint in Argentina, I saw the grand waterfalls of Iguazu, located on the border of Brazil and Paraguay. I joined the festivities of Argentine National Selection fútbol fans when their team played against its South American rivals. I shared an *asado*, *empanadas*, and *milanesa* (traditional Argentine plates) with my host family, and discussed the daily news. I witnessed first-hand the devastating implications of the paralyzing economic conflict between *el campo* (rural land-owners and laborers) and *el gobierno* (the national government) over export taxes. I observed the daily life of the poverty-stricken *villa* dwellers scattered throughout Argentina, and contemplated the cost-benefit structure of a public

university-education system. I learned, through listening and observing and questioning, that a country's history of military dictatorship and violence may leave its citizens hurt, distrusting, unprepared, doubtful, disillusioned, and angry, even some 20 years after the original conflict. Throughout all of this, I gained a deeper sense of myself as a citizen of the US, blessed with so many opportunities, and of my duty to give something back to the community at large. My internship experience was one that I will never forget, the legacy and memories of which I will carry with me and consult frequently as I head into this next great chapter of my life.