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Contact: Kim Puchir, Communications Manager

[kim.p@franciscanmissionservice.org](mailto:kim.p@franciscanmissionservice.org)

202-832-1762, ext. 7

Twenty-two-year old Anna Klonowski arrived in South America in February knowing that she will discover many skills during the two years she will spend volunteering in Cochabamba, Bolivia. She did already find a new ability during her training period with Franciscan Mission Service (FMS). “I am apparently very good at making a peanut butter and jelly bagel sandwich,” she chuckled after her three-month formation period in Washington, DC. “I’ve been told so numerous times.”

Sandwich making for those living on the streets is just one part of the program’s focus on serving those on the margins and living out the Franciscan value of simplicity. Franciscan Mission Service is a nonprofit that prepares and supports lay Catholics desiring to serve in solidarity with economically poor communities. The FMS version of mission is the ministry of presence, which involves accompanying people “in the joys and struggles of their daily lives.”

For instance, Anna perfected her touch with peanut butter and jelly during the direct service portion of her training, which she spent at The Father McKenna Center for men experiencing homelessness. There she learned why the organization addresses the conundrum faced by many people in a situation of flux: how to obtain a copy of official identification, like a birth certificate, without already possessing another form of identification. Navigating government channels to obtain a proper ID is the key to finding benefits and employment that can help someone escape the cycle of poverty and

Where lay people work for peace, justice, and hope

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homelessness.

While on mission, Anna will immerse herself in the joys and challenges of her host community, living on a stipend \$265 a month, accompanying those who are in need, and sharing in cultural and religious celebrations—all while speaking another language. Anna is fluent in Spanish and hopes to learn some Quechua, an indigenous language common in the region.

The new missionary is up for the challenge. “The focus of simple living isn’t about what I don’t have, but rather the space I am creating for relationships with my community and personal growth,” Anna says.

This openness is essential for Anna’s service placement, which allows her to spend time in Cochabamba before discerning which organizations are the best fit for her talents. Since she has so many talents to draw upon, Anna’s term of service could go in several directions. Before graduating as the valedictorian of Wisconsin’s Rice Lake High school, Anna performed high school service projects, including helping to found the Future Business Leaders of America Forrest Run to assist people with brain cancer. She later graduated Summa Cum Laude from the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota. Two previous overseas experiences, a two-week Spanish immersion experience with the College of Saint Benedict and her study abroad in Xela, Guatemala, inspired her to make a two-year commitment to overseas service.

Anna is looking forward to living and working in solidarity with the people of Cochabamba. Though she may be making traditional Bolivian tucumanas instead of peanut butter and jelly bagel sandwiches, Anna’s ministry will be based upon her values of respect, service, and faith.

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