

## Dario and Denise, Keith, Emily and Samuel Leal God's Global Family

### How did you and Dario meet and how did you end up in Northern Ireland?

Denise: I'm from England, Dario is from Chile and our 3 Children Keith (aged 8), Emily (6) and Samuel (8 months) were born in Lisburn, Northern Ireland. Dario and I met whilst working on board MV Logos II, an international ship's company of over 200 people from over 35 countries. The MV Logos II sails around the world, welcoming people in each port to attend conferences on board and to visit its floating bookshop.

Dario and I first met in the Dominican Republic, started going out together in Argentina, were engaged in Gibraltar, married in England and honeymooned in Chile. We then flew to Northern Ireland to start our married life together studying at Belfast Bible College. I completed a 2 year Missions Course and Dario went onto study a theology degree and a Masters in Missions. Following our studies, we moved to Madrid, Spain for 2 years (2001-2003) where Dario worked as a youth pastor. He is now Assistant Minister in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in East Belfast.

### What are some of the challenges and some of the blessings of being a global family?

As a couple coming from countries on different sides of the world, geographical distance and cultural differences characterise our immediate and extended family. If any of you have watched "my Big Fat Greek Wedding", a lot of the comedy in that film struck a chord with me and made me laugh. Having grown up in different cultures with different mother tongues, misunderstandings and conflicting expectations are inevitable. However, I also find it difficult to identify whether these are specifically the challenges of a cross-cultural family seeking to live for God. Maybe they are just the challenges and blessings that everyone faces and enjoys as different people with different personalities share their lives together and grow up together in God.

One particular blessing that we have just recently enjoyed was Christmas and New Year in Chile. It was Keith, Emily and of course Samuel's (at just 1 month old) first time in Chile. It was great for them to spend time with their cousins, Aunts, Uncles, Granny and Granddad and to meet other family members at Auntie Kathy and Uncle Jorge's wedding. They adapted really well to the Chilean culture and were soon chatting away to their cousins in Spanish. Also the fact that Dario's mother tongue is Spanish benefited us during our time in Spain.

Before I left to join the ship, a good friend encouraged me with some verses from Romans (Chapter 8 verse 35-39). The Message puts it like this:

"Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not

homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture:

They kill us in cold blood because they hate you.  
We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one.

None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing - nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable - absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us."

This is my focus for me and my family "nothing and no-one can drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us."

### What does Global Family mean to you?

Dario:

Global is very 'in' at the moment, you can find it almost anywhere to describe an international trademark. It is a comprehensive term, which basically means worldwide. As a family we are a bit like that. I was born and raised in Chile, spent a year in the USA during my teens, travelled through the OM's Ships, and worked for two years in Madrid as a Youth Pastor have all had an impact on the way I see and understand life. I bring to the family some aspects of Latin Chilean Culture, some of the easiness of the USA, some of the many different cultural experiences that I lived through the ship (especially 4 months in Brazil, 4 months in Gibraltar and 4 months in Ireland), and the sun of Spain!!! This plus the experience of living in Northern Ireland have shaped my faith and my understanding of God. To understand that there is not only one way to worship God, that what God sees is actually what is in the heart of the worshipper of every language and culture brings freedom, open-mindedness, peace and understanding. I do not have to understand everything but rest in the fact that God does.

God is a God who delights in diversity, in multicolour faces and different languages; in fact he speaks all of them. He is inclusive and he promised that those who earnestly seek him could find him. He is a Global God, with a Global vision to reach the world he created with the good news of his Son.

As a global family we feel thankful for this vision, and we are at ease with the fact that cultural barriers are overcome with God's help.

The challenge for us a Global family is to be contextual to the cultural paradigm shift that is affecting us all. It is not a secret that our society is changing; there is more diversity, colours and languages.

To be contextual in the way to welcome and encourage diversity, and above all in communicating practically and verbally the message of the Global God who loves the Global world so much that he sent his Son with the capacity to be understood by every language, colour and culture of the world.

