

Link Letter No.9 November 2014

Dear friends,

Tuesday was the day of the first meeting for the first lesson of the Wichi Abundant Life course in Pacara, a community some 30 miles of dirt road east of Tartagal. Chris was under the weather with a stomach bug but that didn't deter him. There were about 20 people present with a high proportion being able to read Wichi, many of them young people. Chris, who has gained a lot of experience through the course with the communities on the Pilcomayo River, said that it was one of the most animated groups to have done the course with. Please pray for this group as we work through the next 17 lessons and beyond.

Wednesday Asociana meeting

Does the name "Cogos" mean anything to you? It didn't mean anything to Ed either when



Chris making preparations in Pacará

he heard it. He was in a meeting of the Asociana team (the group of five Christians committed to helping the Indian communities on land rights and similar issues). Matias, the Asociana lawyer, was briefing the team from his office in Salta, on the different cases via Skype. The instructions



Ed and Marie Brice
CMS mission partners
Argentina

One of CMS's longest serving mission partners, Ed and Marie have recently moved from Paraguay to Tartagal in Northern Argentina after 30 years serving the Enxet people group within the Chaco of Paraguay. Ed and Marie have taken on the pastoral oversight of the Anglican Church in Tartagal and will work in the northern area of the Chaco.

about “Cogos” were directed to José, a man in his forties with two teenage sons who lives in the isolated Sta. Victoria community across the river from Bolivia – “Bring him to make a statement”. The lunch break provided an opportunity to ask José about Cogos.

José is a Wichi Indian, and ten years ago his son was run over and killed early one morning by a local bus as it rattled

through the dusty, unmade up lanes of his village. His son had been out drinking the night before and was either staggering along or possibly even laying down sleeping; either way the bus driver “didn’t see him”.

Ten years to resolve a straight forward case of manslaughter and dangerous driving is unacceptable and an embarrassing reminder of still how little justice there is for the poor and marginalised. From the lawyer’s point of view, this makes it all the more important that a precedent is set so that the people who live in these remote areas realise that they are not beyond the law, whether victims or the perpetrators. However, Cogos sees things rather differently.



Celebrating the work of the Holy Spirit

Why should anyone, who isn’t a member of his extended family or people, who lives hundreds of miles away and doesn’t even know him or his village, be in the least bit interested in what happened to his son and much less stand up against the powerful bus owner from the town. No, much better resort to the familiar methods used over the centuries in their conflict with the white settlers. If the fact that the death of the owner of the bus company, about five years ago, is clear evidence that justice is being done, why all the fuss of talking to lawyers and making statements.

There is, however, another reason why this case is important. Just last year there was a much more significant one that slipped



Pacará church and students



Visitors from the rehabilitation centre



Pacará church

through the team's fingers. It was so important and would have set a precedent against the indiscriminate exploitation of poor Indian labourers and their families. The case was on the point of going to court. There was no doubt about the outcome – the companies and contractors involved would be made an example of and a very large sum would be demanded in compensation. It would also make others think twice before taking advantage of Indian labourers. But after months of hard work by the lawyer, the whole thing collapsed when the company involved made a private payment (a fraction of the amount they would have had to pay in compensation) in exchange for the man dropping the charges. He had lost two children as a result of the inhuman treatment he and his family had received while working at an isolated work camp.

Sadly that isn't the end of the story either. With the welcome pay-off money, the man bought three motorbikes, a large fridge and a washing machine with a tumble drier. Within a couple of months, however, he had sold the motorbikes and the fridge for a fraction of their value. It would appear that he still has the washing machine, very necessary one might say, but in his community there is neither piped water nor electricity, so, it's anyone's guess what it is being used for. There was, however, enough money left over for everyone to get drunk for a week.

Why give so much space to such sad stories? To encourage you to pray for the Anglican Church in Northern Argentina, the majority of whose members are Indians and for the Asociana team who every day have to try to walk through this moral minefield. For the good of society,

the right to receive justice according to the national laws must be honoured, for everyone. However, as recipients of that justice, the marginalised Indians will often be confronted with challenges that they have never had to face before, challenges which put such a strain on their society that may well destroy them.

The harvest celebration had to wait until the tomatoes were ripe, so it wasn't until mid September that it took place. We were especially pleased



Harvest celebration

to have with us Pastor Martinez, his wife and three of the men they are currently helping break the grim hold drugs have had on their lives and instead encouraging to follow Christ. Some of the Sunday school children were the first to arrive and excitedly helped prepare the vegetables we were going to give away. Some of them witnessed the wounds of drug abuse still festering in their families. They participated with enthusiasm the singing of the power of God's Spirit to bring a different harvest as we had another chance to present the gospel to neighbours and distribute carrots and tomatoes. One of the direct results was two more women for Marie to visit!

Praise God for...

- The Wichi Abundant Life course in Pacara, the 20 plus young and older men and women involved.
- The greater public awareness and opposition to the wholesale deforestation of the Chaco.
- Asociana's important influence in the region.
- For the harvest celebrations and the ongoing production of the "Buen Pastor" garden.

Pray for...

- Future Wichi tutors of Abundant Life to will catch the vision and respond to the Spirit.
- Political will for a just resolution to the many outstanding Indian land claims.
- Wisdom and effective communication of Asociana team members and lawyers with influential Indians.
- Confident expression of the Christian faith in the internal and external working of Asociana.
- The developing relationship with the drug rehabilitation centre.
- New vision for work with children, young people and their families.
- Women that Marie is discipling, both new and not so new Christians.

In Christ

Ed and Marie



Pastor Ruben Martinez and Roxana

www.cms-uk.org



Church Mission Society

Watlington Road, Oxford, OX4 6BZ Tel: 01865 787400 Fax: 01865 776375
Email: info@cms-uk.org www.cms-uk.org Registered Charity Number 1131655