

Link Letter No.6 October 2013

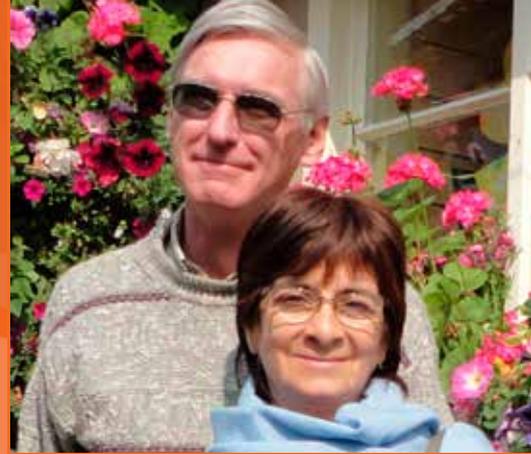
Dear friends,

“Today if you have relinquished and turned your back on all those things we’ve been talking about and want to walk with Jesus, lift up your hand because I want to take your name. If you have been reconciled to God and today really and definitively yield to God, lift your hand up high we want to take your names to pray for you.”

With these words, Carlos Annacondia – or one of the other evangelists every night for 10 nights running in August – invited the people who had responded to the gospel message to make themselves known so that the counsellors could take down their details. During the next few minutes, the same message was repeated from the platform and there then followed an invitation for prayer for healing: *“How many felt Jesus’ healing touch tonight? Raise your hand...”*

Nine days after the campaign, the first full evaluation meeting was held. Despite the most variable weather, ranging from warm to bitterly cold and with clouds of dust, every night there were over 3,000 people present and on the last night over 10,000. Of the 2,800 or so response cards handed in, 40 per cent of the cards were from people living in communities outside Tartagal, many of them Indian communities, and 60 per cent were from people who had come to Christ for the first time. The leader of the counsellors also told us that on more than one occasion when asking people: *“Are you receiving Christ for the first time or are you looking to be reconciled to God”*, they would respond: *“No, no, I have been a Christian for 14 [or whatever number of] years; I am just praising God.”*

Without a doubt, the campaign was as much as anything a revitalising experience for Christians, especially for those of us involved in the different teams. For the many people in Tartagal who weren’t Christians but who came along or who saw it on the television, there was also much to thank God for. In addition to the preaching of the gospel every night, there was time dedicated to pray for the sick and to hear testimonies from those who had received healing. Every night at least five different people would give an account of the healing they had received (their stories were first checked by a team of local doctors who gave their time



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.



Praying for the sick in Tartagal

without cost) but we heard that those who shared their testimonies represented just 20 per cent of all who came forward having been healed. There were also several stories of people who were healed without going forwards for prayer, while others were healed at home while watching the campaign on television.

To give two examples, a girl aged 13 who had a tumor the size of a tennis ball on the back of her neck was happily playing the whole time of the conference and when people were packing up to go home they discovered that her tumor had disappeared. A man whose wife was suffering from cancer of the uterus asked a member of the worship team on the Monday where Carlos Annacondia was staying, as he wanted to ask Carlos personally to pray for his wife. The reply was that such information could not be given out but not to worry since it was God that heals not the evangelist, and on the last night of the campaign he shared his testimony of how his wife had been healed that Monday.

There were also testimonies of people who had had a piece of clothing brought on their behalf because they needed healing but were unable to come, and how after prayer they had received healing. When the doctors at the campaign looked at the results of the analysis of one man who was in hospital, they said there was nothing wrong with him. They were then shown the previous set of results of analyses taken before he was prayed for, and they agreed that he had been in need of dialysis and a kidney transplant.

Ed and Marie were with the intercessors during the evening meetings about five yards to the left of the platform. Half the team would stand to pray for 15 minutes while the other 30 or so members sat down to pray, before swapping over. There were times when everyone stood up spontaneously to pray and others when minds began to wonder, but one of the jobs of the three pastors involved was to try and help people keep their minds focused on praying. The space between the stage and the tent was the main access route used by the "stretcher bearers" (a team of about 60 people), taking people to the deliverance tent which was next to ours, and at times there was a continuous stream of people being helped to that tent. There were about 10 teams trained to help those in need work through the different issues, which had left them open to the influence of evil spirits.

One evening a man called Manuel López came forward and told how walking had been very difficult for him due to a swollen and inflamed knee, but after receiving ministry in the deliverance tent he not only received healing for his knee and leg but was freed from the influence of evil spirits. He was not the only one to receive physical healing as a result of this ministry. About mid-morning during every day of the campaign, pastors were invited to join the campaign team for their devotional and prayer time. We met together in the same white tent and then, after about an hour, anyone needing counseling was invited to come forwards. For the next few hours, teams of people were available to minister to them and the pastor in charge of the logistics team (as he put it... "*They were the first ones to arrive and the last ones to leave every day*") told us that on several occasions very needy people arrived at the site when there was no one there except members of his team. However, rather than turn these people away, he was able to minister to them (in fact he was also able to visit them long before any of the other people who were registered received a visit).

During the evaluation meeting we heard how many of the teams started off with less than their full complement of workers but how gradually numbers improved and a spirit of peace and mutual support predominated. We were told that the last time Annacondia held a campaign in Tartagal in 1996, Indians were largely spectators but this time, thanks largely to the preliminary work done by Pastor Nicolas, about 40 per cent of the members of the different teams were from one or other of the Indian ethnic groups which make up Tartagal and the surrounding area. We also heard that before the campaign the Tapiete community was well known as being a place where drugs were not only sold freely but also consumed



The intercessors tent

and that the police were loathe to go in because they always felt obliged to use excessive force. During the campaign the drug consumption and sales dried up and there were no social problems, with nothing stolen from the site. In fact, those living around the site set up food stalls every evening and improved their income. There was a general feeling

of gratitude to God for all that we had been able to witness and a desire that every effort should be made to build on these new levels of confidence and cooperation which had grown amongst Christians of different churches over the past few months. The first suggestion on to how to achieve this was to continue the monthly united prayer meetings. The following Monday evening was chosen, but as the meeting was drawing to a close there was a concern expressed for areas of the city which were still suffering from serious social problems. One area in particular on the west of the city, not too far from our church (the Good Shepherd), is the 9th of July (Barrio 9 de julio).

“For hands were lifted up to the throne of the Lord” Exodus 17:16. At the end of July, a newspaper announced that a group of about 100 young people had taken control of this district of Tartagal after a youth had been killed by a gang in the area. The inhabitants of the district had been taken hostage and not even the police were prepared to go in. In the previous 10 months, two other young people had died as different gangs attacked each other and the community had organised several marches demanding better protection and clarification of the crimes committed. A local journalist reporting on the problems said: *“the area is plagued by drug outlets and even though the neighbours protest to the police, nobody does anything.”*

The situation had not improved by early September. The police had gone in and arrested a number of youth but they had been met by violence and their heavy handed response had increased the tension. Currently 11 young people from the community are detained and a 14 year old is in hospital in Salta, at risk of remaining permanently paralysed as a result of injuries sustained. The police also confiscated a selection of weapons. Having been out of the country in July and not watching television, we had little idea of the background leading to the current conflict.

In the closing minutes of the evaluation meeting, the decision was taken to hold the united prayer meeting not in the regular meeting place but in the 9th July community. The following Monday, we met up with other members of the intercessors group outside the cemetery! We walked about a quarter of a mile to the large football field in the centre of the community to meet up with local Christians and pray. There were eight of us in all. Pastor Roberto, the current president of the Pastor’s Fraternity, informed us that he had spoken to the community leaders to see whether they would accompany us, and asked the police to also. The police said that the request had been made too late so they couldn’t come, but recommended that we didn’t go either! But here we were, wandering through the gloom along a dirt road, the only sign of life being lights in houses about 100 yards away on either side and the occasional moped. We clambered up the road to the open area which was surrounded by houses occupied by the football pitch. The only light now was coming from a few street lamps and from the houses. Out of the darkness appeared six figures who were part of a group of local Christians who were waiting for us. They told us that they had divided into four groups, one at each corner of the football field, and we were to occupy the centre of the field and together we would all pray. We



“Some people have still got their hands up”

told the Christians that we were there to hold their hands up – the idea in mind being the passage in Exodus 17 where, as Moses prayed for Israel in their fight against the Amalekites, Aaron and Hur, stationed on each side of him, helped Moses keep his tired hands in the air so he could continue to pray. For about 15 minutes we prayed for the local community, its problems, the church and the local authorities. We must have been there the best part of an hour in total and we finished by forming a large circle in the centre of the football pitch singing and praying together with the local Christians, a group of about 60. This community is made up largely of Guaraní Indians, and apart from some children and a couple of mopeds, no one else came in view. We returned home rejoicing but with little idea of what might happen next. But one very positive outcome was that the demoralised Christians living within the community began to meet every night to pray and prepare for a special showing of a film about forgiveness that they were putting on the following Friday. They also have plans to hold a special evangelistic event.

Those of you who were in the UK during July hardly need to be told what glorious weather we had from the day of our arrival on July 3 until our departure on 1 August. We only saw a few showers and all towards the end of the month. The day of Derek's graduation was no exception – it was so beautiful. It is difficult to express what a wonderful time we had. We also enjoyed the sunshine and hospitality in Whitehaven, Leeds, Mattershall, Eccles, York, Liverpool, Oxford and Reading, and are so grateful to God for all the love that was lavished on us and the help we had in traveling. It was a real encouragement to meet up with friends, family and Christian colleagues but we are only sorry not to have been able to meet everybody that we had hoped to meet, but we will – God willing – be back in the UK for home ministry in about a years time.



Derek's graduation

For praise:

- An excellent journey and stay in the UK, for hospitality and celebration with Derek and family.
- For safe travel and arrival back in Tartagal.
- For God's blessing on so many aspects of the Annacondia campaign, for the thousands of people who heard and responded to the gospel, and for the improved relations among the different Christian groups in Tartagal.
- For the opportunity to share with the Christians in the 9th July community.
- For the three Vida Abundante students as they come to the end of the course.
- Marie's mum who has moved from Paraguay to Mar del Plata to live with her other daughter.

For prayer:

- Derek, now living in York with my sister, as he looks for works and prepares to apply to do a PGCE next year.
- For the unresolved problems facing the Asociacion team and for the ongoing land rights claims.
- The 34 people who live near The Good Shepherd church and responded to the invitation during the Annacondia campaign – pray for them as we contact them over the next few weeks.
- The Christians in the 9th July community.
- Wisdom for the coordinators of the pastoral fraternity as they look to God as to how to build on the new sense of unity among Christians in the town.

In Christ

Ed and Marie

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