



# MISSION PARAGUAY 2007 Report



*In association with  
SAMS GB & SAMS Ireland*

## Our Mission



Mission Paraguay works through the Anglican Church in Paraguay to provide funds and a volunteer work force to assist with practical projects, usually buildings, which the local church would find difficult, if not impossible to provide themselves. Through the Church we also fund activities with children and young people and a range of community based work to relieve need and hardship.

Each year groups of committed Christians of all ages travel to Paraguay to live and work in the community so gaining a unique opportunity to experience another culture; to see how the local church is working and growing; to share fellowship, laughing and sometimes crying together; to receive and show the love of God.

## A BIG Thank You

During July and August 2007 41 volunteers from Ireland, the USA and the UK from the following churches travelled to work in Paraguay:

Annagh Parish Church, Belturbet, Co. Cavan, Ireland  
Christ Church, Cheltenham  
Emmanuel Church, Wimbledon  
Grace Reformed Episcopal Church, Moscow, Pennsylvania, USA  
Holy Trinity, Cheltenham  
Holy Trinity, LLandrindod Wells, Powys  
St. Anne's, Wrenthorpe, Wakefield, West Yorks.  
St John's, Church of Ireland, Dromara, Northern Ireland  
St. John the Baptist, Burscough, Lancashire  
St. Luke's Reformed Episcopal Church, Santa Ana, California, USA  
St Paul's, Skelmersdale, Lancashire  
St. Patrick's, Bunbeg, Co Donegal, Ireland  
St Peter's, Oundle,  
Trinity Church, Cheltenham  
Wrenthorpe Mission, Wakefield, West Yorks

We are also indebted to other churches and organisations who gave donations of money, equipment, children's sports gear or other items to support the work:

Burscough Football Club  
Christchurch, Warminster  
Elliot's Electrical Contractors Ltd. Burscough  
Emmanuel Church, Southport  
Hesketh Lane Methodist Chapel Youth Group, Tarleton  
LLandrindod High School  
MGt, Scotland  
T & W Garner, Skelmersdale  
The Mistral Group, Oxfordshire  
The Rotary Club, Aughton and Maghull Branch  
Somerset County Cricket Club



We wish to express our gratitude to Colin Cunliffe and the Fire Service; Graham Aston and Luxfords of Weybridge for allowing us to contribute clothing, tools, sewing machines and medical items to containers being shipped to Paraguay.

As in past years, the work would not have been possible without the generosity of churches and individuals taking part. This year a total of **£28,097** was donated to fund the programme of work.

Thank you to all those volunteers who travelled to Paraguay in 2007. Every year we are overwhelmed by the sacrifices people make to pay for their own travel from home and living expenses whilst in Paraguay but especially for their commitment to the people of Paraguay and the work of the Anglican Church there. We also recognise that in each case there is a back-up team raising funds, collecting gifts to distribute, providing organisational and administrative assistance and most importantly giving prayerful support before, during and after the project period. On behalf of Bishop John Ellison, Auxiliary Bishop Andrés Rodríguez, local pastors in the Chaco, Concepción and Asunción and all members of the Anglican Church in Paraguay a big thank you to everyone.

There is a heavy reliance upon the Anglican Church in Paraguay to provide translators, accommodation, vehicles and drivers to enable groups of volunteers to operate. Local pastors have liaised on a day-to-day basis to enable arrangements to be made for accommodation and the provision of meals. All of this places a heavy strain on already stretched Diocesan personnel. The leaders of Mission Paraguay, on behalf of all those taking part, wish to express their sincere thanks to Bishop John and Judie Ellison, the Mission Paraguay Support Group, Diocesan staff and members of the local churches for their assistance, hospitality, friendship and patience.

## **Report on the main 2007 Projects**

### **Asunción**

For the second consecutive year Roque Alonso was the base for the group of 14 volunteers who worked in the Asunción area for two and a half weeks in July. The large multi-use room adjacent to the church had proved excellent accommodation last year but recent termite damage had necessitated considerable rebuilding and the result was luxurious accommodation with hot showers and recently redecorated walls. No cold showers or draughts blowing through the holes in the walls this year!!

Asunción has an excellent bus service and this coupled with the availability of hired transport enabled Mission Paraguay to undertake a variety of activities in different communities and to utilise the full range of skills within the group. Some people worked with children while others carried out basic home improvements in the different communities details of which are given on pages 6 and 7. Others completed significant redecoration work at the Esperanza Foster Home run by mission partners Murray and Penny Metcalf.



The main project was at Emboscada where in spring 2006, through the generosity of one of the churches involved in the volunteer programme, approximately 5 hectares of land was purchased. Emboscada is about 40km north east of the centre of Asunción, where large



plots of land are being sold for development. Consequently this is an ideal location for the Church to develop a significant presence by building a retreat centre to be used on a regular basis by all the congregations in the Asunción area and the schools and faculty which operate through the Anglican Church. In 2006 the July group levelled an access road across the site, cleared scrub and a number of really well-rooted palm trees to prepare a large football field. The first phase of the main building comprising kitchen, toilets/showers and bedroom area for the caretaker and his wife, together with

essential secure storage was completed and this year we were able to fund the construction of the remainder of this building. The primary task for the 2007 volunteers was to fill, consolidate and level the floor of the large main meeting area. This entailed moving huge amounts of fill material by wheelbarrow into the building. JCB's and other machinery, which we take for granted in the UK, are not available in Paraguay! The surprise was that most of the group said how they had enjoyed the work and they were serious! Adelio, the resident caretaker is also a skilled builder and some of the group assisted him to construct the external walls. When the volunteers left at the end of July, this second phase of the work was progressing well and is now nearing completion. Adelio will continue to develop the site as funding is available during the coming months and it is planned that Mission Paraguay will be able to fund Phase Three, the building of dormitory accommodation in 2008.

On 29<sup>th</sup> July well over 200 people from Zeballos Cue, Mirador, Remansito, Luque, San Lorenzo and Roque Alonso were present at Emboscada for the leaving service for the volunteers. The football matches, barbecue and range of social activities taking place throughout the afternoon demonstrated the potential of this site to benefit people of all ages from the congregations living in these very deprived areas of Asunción where the majority of people rarely travel far from their immediate environment.

**Please pray** for the congregations at Zeballos Cue, Mirador, Remansito, Luque, San Lorenzo and Roque Alonso and for their pastors and lay workers.

## **Concepción**

17 volunteers from USA, Ireland, England and Wales worked at Concepción for 3 weeks in August. The main project was to work alongside local labour to complete a multi-use building at Inmaculada, a district near the Rio Paraguay on the outskirts of the city characterised by its red earth roads, open drains strewn with rubbish and loose horses, pigs and hens wandering the community. The area has high unemployment and serious social problems. Many of the simple homes lack basic amenities.



Claire Holmes, a missionary from Ireland who works tirelessly with children in many areas of Concepción and the surrounding Chaco area, started a children's group in Inmaculada a number of years ago but lacked permanent premises. Following purchase of land, last year saw the erection of a tinglado (roof supported on a lightweight steel lattice framework) and a site security fence (which we painted this year). In 2007 we have been able to fund the completion of the multi-use building, which has good shower and toilet facilities, to enable Claire and her helpers to extend their work. To emphasise the need for this building, even



prior to the walls being finished or the floor completed, one evening the main room was in use by approximately 180 women and children.

As well as working on the main project a range of redecoration and improvement works were completed at the main church site in Concepción. A large storeroom was cleared and repainted so that it could be used by Claire for children's work. Part of the redecoration scheme used the artistic skills of a number of the group to design and paint large murals of bible scenes on the walls of this and another room, which they were using as a bedroom so that it could subsequently provide

additional space for the growing youth ministry. Other volunteers made cakes for children and travelled daily with Claire and her team to undertake craft work, lead drama and singing, give tuition in English and undertake a range of activities with children of all ages at Inmaculada and in outlying areas of the Chaco.

**Please pray** for Claire Holmes and her team and for their work amongst the children of Concepción and that she may find sufficient time for rest and relaxation. Pray also for the ministry of Auxiliary Bishop Andrés Rodríguez and Pastor Guillermo Diana Rojas in the Concepción area.

### **Some personal reflections from Sarah Holman who worked at Concepción:**



*Paraguay gets under your skin. It is a subtle thing, something to do with the place (vast expanses of palm trees and swamps, and dusty cities) and it is something to do with the poverty that you see, in its varied forms, wherever you go.*

*But mostly, I think, it is to do with the people. The people I met were warm hearted; they approached us as friends. They demonstrated their faithfulness and love for God by greeting us as family members. They challenged my understanding of reliance on prayer for every aspect of their lives. We all know in our heads that prayer works. But maybe we don't always practice that fully in our hearts. Back in England, we don't need to pray for our water because we have enough. We don't pray for healing in quite the same way because we have free health care. There are so many things we take for granted. And so many things we wrongly prioritise.*

*Mission Paraguay was a chance for me to step out of my world and into someone else's. I think the things we achieved out there, the building and painting and the provisions we made for those in need were all great things to give, but I know I've come back with a lot more than I could ever have given.*

### **Para Todoi in the Chaco**

Living in the Chaco is normally a challenge for those of us visiting from a more temperate climate but during August 2007 the conditions were particularly difficult. This year the people of the Chaco are suffering from a severe drought and consequently the aljibes (underground brick built storage tanks for rainwater) were dry when the groups arrived. The situation has not subsequently eased and there have also been serious fires which have devastated

thousands of acres of land. The terrain of the Chaco is completely flat and so the regular high winds during August caused frequent dust storms which together with the temperature variation of, on occasions, as much as 30 degrees Celsius in 24 hours emphasised the harsh living conditions of the indigenous people and the fragility of their communities.

This project was to build a small church of 12m x 9m floor area and approximately 4.5m high with a new aljibe at the small village of Para Todoi in the homeland of El Estribo which is almost 400km northwest of Asunción. El Estribo comprises a number of Indian villages connected by dirt roads. The Anglican Church has a significant presence in the region with the local pastors providing vision and clear leadership in the development of these communities. The building of a church is significant in the development of a village because it is not only a centre for Christian worship but it also provides a much needed community building for a range of other activities. When the group of 11 volunteers returned home the building was nearly complete and during September the Paraguayan and indigenous Indian builders who we had worked with were able to complete the building.

The accommodation was camp beds in a simple wooden church at the village of Dos Palmas which is a few miles from Para Todoi. Living in the Chaco for 3 weeks allowed many opportunities for working with children, visiting the different villages and building relationships with the community, despite the language and cultural difficulties.

The homes of the local indigenous people are mostly built with walls of palm logs, earth floors and roofs of corrugated metal sheets (chapas). Many, however, are in a very poor condition being constructed of an amalgam of plastic sheets, palm logs, pieces of timber and whatever other material is available. There are no builders merchants near these communities and materials normally have to be transported long distances. Every year, working with family members we are able to construct a number of replacement homes or supply chapas and timber for self build home improvements. This year 8 families were provided with new or improved homes.

Chris Hawksbee, a mission partner who has lived in Paraguay for much of his life and is currently leading a number of self sufficiency initiatives amongst the indigenous communities, worked alongside the group. Chris's wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm, sense of humour and linguistic skills were key factors assisting the group to cope with the conditions and maximise the use of their skills to benefit the local community.

**Below is an extract of a diary written by Alex Lines a member of the group at Para Todoi.**

*Things may have been uncomfortable compared to what we were used to, but just outside was a constant reminder that we take so much for granted. For instance, we had a gas cooker and gas lamps from a cylinder, so we were able to have hot meals every evening and our day was not confined to daylight hours. On several occasions Mario, the pastor of Dos Palmas, asked us to borrow one of our gas lamps for an evening so that they could hold a service where they could see one another. Whenever the meat we had went off and we considered it unsafe, the villagers were happy to snap it up for themselves.*

*Even out here, I have to confess to feeling a little spoilt, especially after coming back and having the benefit of hindsight. The weather was very extreme but very random; it could be horrendously windy with sand flying into every eye and mouth it could find one day, then the next day could be calm and still but freezing cold, with everyone huddling round a small fire clutching our mugs of warm soup in our shivering hands. The day after that would then have us lying around with as few layers as decently possible, sweat dripping from every inch of skin, before turning cold again by nightfall. Each different weather condition would carry with it different complaints at the time, but looking back we were suffering the same problems*

*for 3 weeks that the Indians face all their lives, with much less comforts than us. They did not seem to hold this against us, however. The locals just seemed delighted to have us in their midst, which could prove to be a little awkward at times. During the services they would*



*insist that each of us were sitting on a chair, whilst mothers and children would be content on the floor. When they held a farewell meal on our last evening they served us first. They all shook each one of our hands whenever they could. Two of us had our birthdays out there, and they made a special mention for both of us on the day of the birthday in their service, made us stand up on our own and presented a present to us. The whole 3 weeks was a very humbling experience, being treated in such a way by those with so little.*

*However, the 3 weeks came to an end, and with the church all but finished, it was time for us to leave. After all that time having to go to the nearby reservoir to collect water to wash, and sometimes finding little fish accompanying us in our shower, the tiled bathrooms of the little hotel we stayed in were fantastic! And ceramic toilets! And proper beds! And air-conditioning! Paradise!*



**Please pray** for the community of El Estribo, for the community leaders, the work of pastors Lucio and Mario and their relationship with the wider Paraguayan church. Also pray Chris Hawksbee's ongoing ministry amongst the indigenous people and for his safety in travelling.

## **Work in the Community**

This was the fourth year that we were able to fund and work on a range of home improvements in the local communities within the Asunción area. Each year the amount and scope of this work has increased. In 2007 projects were undertaken in Remansito, Zeballos Cue and Roque Alonso which comprise some of the poorest quality housing in the capital. There are few paved roads or sewers. Generally in these areas families have constructed their own homes using basic materials. Water supplies are inadequate and many homes have either no electricity or unsafe installations. This year projects included providing new safe electrical installations to 5 homes; building new block walls to a kitchen to replace plastic sheets, old boarding and corrugated iron; providing a new timber house for a family and providing 2 families who lived together in extremely basic conditions with a toilet and associated water supply and drainage. 3 very overcrowded homes where parents, numerous children and in one case the grandmother, all slept together in the single bedroom were each provided with an additional bedroom. At another very small timber home we were asked to repair the roof but it proved more worthwhile to provide the family with a larger rebuilt home with electricity. A number of earth floors were replaced with concrete.

In some cases local building workers, many of whom have little employment for much of the year, were employed to undertake much of this work but members of the July group assisted alongside local labour. In some cases family members helped with the work and in a number

of instances materials were provided to enable families, many of whom have good basic construction skills, to undertake the work themselves. When the group returned home all outstanding work was completed using local labour.

For this type of community project a relatively small amount of funding will benefit a substantial number of families and encourage them to help themselves. Volunteers have greatly valued the involvement in this type of work which has given them the opportunity to meet local families.

## Work with children

Once again this year, in every group we were greatly blessed by many gifted people who specifically wished to work with children of all ages. This work cuts across cultural differences and language barriers and results in a great deal of fun for local children and the many adults who join in.

For the July group work centred upon the children's clubs at Remansito, Mirador and Roque Alonso. We greatly appreciated the preparation work undertaken by Penny and Murray Metcalf and the local leaders of the children's groups. A production line for the manufacture of model wooden cars was organised which, when distributed, were a huge success. Most people in the group were able to assist staff from FEISA, the Anglican Teacher training College in Asunción with the mobile toy library. This valued resource, which travels to the communities in the Asunción area, provides the opportunity for children, many of whom have no toys, to learn through play. Visits were also made to the children's club organised by Pastor Agustin and Teresa Maidana at San Andrés Church which benefits children from the Chacarita, an area of severe social deprivation situated not far from the centre of the city.



One feature of working in the Chaco is the constant presence of groups of children and the model aeroplanes, balloons, kites, etc. taken by the group provided hours of enjoyment. Colouring sheets were enjoyed not only by the children whose schools have little in the way of paper, books and other resources but also by their mothers and grandmothers most of whom have received little formal education.

**Please pray** for the work of FEISA, for the continued success of the toy library in and around the Asunción area and for their pioneering educational work in the Chaco. Also pray for Pastor Agustin and Teresa and their team's work with the children from the Chacarita.

## Medical work

Unfortunately this year none of the volunteers had professional medical experience and so it was not possible to organise medical days as had been the case in some past years. Despite this, Mission Paraguay was able to fund urgent medical treatment and medicines for a number of people particularly in the Asunción area. In addition to paying for visits to consultants, x-rays and dental attention, this included an eye operation and treatment for a badly broken leg for an indigenous Indian woman. During the year, thanks to the generosity of certain GP's and other supporters we have been able to send first aid and general medical supplies and equipment to Paraguay. Much of this has been transported for use by Nurse Beryl Baker who works in the Chaco and is the only fully qualified health worker for many thousands of



indigenous people living in isolated communities across a large area of the Chaco. Her work is comprehensive and involves such things as treatment for parasites, TB, basic dentistry, snakebite, cancer, gunshot and knife wounds and family planning. During August, one of the volunteers from the USA who is a medical student was able to work with Beryl. As there are no hospitals in the Chaco, the Anglican Church provides assistance to transport Indian people requiring medical attention to a hospital in Asunción or Concepción and recently through a very generous donation from one of Mission Paraguay's supporters a significant amount of funding was given to support this work.



**Please pray** for Beryl Baker, for her safety in travelling and her day-to-day dedication to provide the medical support for thousands of indigenous Indian people in the Chaco. Also pray for Diocesan Administrator Teodosio Rivas and other members of the Anglican Church as they organize transport and hospital

visits for indigenous patients to Asunción and Concepción.

## Relaxation

As in past years, Mission Paraguay ended with a journey to Brazil to relax in a hotel and experience the spectacular beauty of God's world through a visit to Iguazu falls.

## An update on some past projects



Below is a brief update on some past projects. We give thanks to see how God is working through the local church in these areas. It was a particular blessing that some of the volunteers who worked on these projects were amongst the 2007 groups who visited.

### The Albergue at Inmaculada, Concepción

In 2006 as part of the work at Inmaculada, an albergue (hostel) was built specifically for the use of the indigenous Indian people from the Chaco who needed to visit Concepción usually as a result of illness in the family. The system is that when a relative is in hospital, the family are required to feed and look after them. Previously there were very limited facilities for visiting indigenous people and many were abused and unjustly accused of a variety of misdemeanours. It was therefore a priority to provide them with secure accommodation where they could also prepare meals for sick relatives in hospital. When last visited at the end of August there were 15 indigenous people staying in the albergue.

### La Herencia (the Inheritance), Yatnata, Sombrero Piri, Chaco

In 2004 following many years of prayer for a new building to replace the timber church burnt down over 20 years previously, a new church was completed at Yatnata to serve the surrounding villages and particularly the 3 congregations of Yatnata, Palo Blanco and La Rosa Cué. People now travel many kilometres on donkeys, bicycles and horses to use the building which has also become a centre for many community activities ranging from the

annual 3-day music festival to being a venue for women to meet to make beaded necklaces, key rings and other artisan items which bring much needed income to support families in an area with little employment opportunities. During 2007 an electrical supply was brought to this part of the Chaco and local community leaders increasingly see church buildings as vital in drawing the people together during a time of growing outside pressures on the indigenous communities.

## **Zeballos Cue**

In 2005 groups of volunteers from Ireland and England assisted with the construction of a large multiuso building behind the church at Zeballos Cue. During the last 2 years its regular use has continued to develop with a range of activities particularly youth and children's work. Soon after the completion of the building, the church congregation with the help of the Diocese began to fund a Saturday lunch for local children from poor homes. This has continued and when we visited in July 2007 there were over 70 children receiving what for many was the most nutritious meal that they would receive each week. This year Mission Paraguay was able to give some assistance with funding this initiative. Following our initial work, other external funding was gained by the Anglican Diocese to pay for significant refurbishment of the adjacent single storey buildings including greatly improved toilet and shower facilities to allow the opening of a PEPE school. Gloria Maldonada, a trained teacher and member of the congregation at Zeballos Cue is working daily on a voluntary basis, assisted by a number of mums, to teach 33 children aged between 4 and 6 years of age. The Ministry of Education visited the school earlier this year but it will take some time for approval to be gained and for Gloria to receive a regular salary from them. As this development consolidates, there is a potential for further work at Zeballos Cue.

**Please pray** for pastors *Elvio Cabañas* and *Teodosio Campestequi* and all the leaders of the indigenous communities in the Chaco. Also pray for Pastor *Luis Echeverria* and his wife *Regina* and the congregation at Zeballos Cue.

***“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” Hebrews 6 v10***



## Mission Paraguay 2008

Plans for 2008 are not yet finalised although it is anticipated that work to be carried out during July and August will include the third phase of the retreat centre at Emboscada and major projects in the Chaco and the Concepción area to promote the work of the Anglican Church.

As in 2007 we hope to support a range of work with children and young people and assist with the provision of medical facilities.

The work in the community has grown in the Asunción area and we hope to extend this further by undertaking work in Concepción. In the Chaco we hope to be able to fund the building of at least 1 aljibe (£1,000) and work with Chris Hawksbee to provide improved housing for at least 10 indigenous families.



**Please note** that the cost of all the building projects and other work comes from sacrificial giving and fundraising, a large percentage of which is from the churches that the volunteers on the teams come from. All donations are channelled to Paraguay through the South American Mission Society (SAMS), or Burscough Outreach Trust (Charity No: 1089034).

If you would like further information about how you may support the work of Mission Paraguay or if you wish to take part in a short-term mission trip to Paraguay in 2008 please contact the UK co-ordinator:



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**Please pray** that God will direct the plans and arrangements currently underway for the Mission Paraguay programme for 2008. Please also pray for the ongoing work of the Anglican Church in the Chaco, Concepción and Asunción and particularly for Bishop Andres and the Nominating Committee as they seek the next Diocesan Bishop following the recent retirement of Bishop John Ellison.