

Mission Paraguay News Update

Working together, changing lives, growing in faith



In the Autumn of 2006, a meeting attended by representatives of the South American Mission Society (SAMS) Great Britain, SAMS Ireland and churches in Cheltenham and Burscough was held at the instigation of Bishop John Ellison the then Bishop of Paraguay. The purpose was to determine the way forward for coordinating the visits of groups of volunteers from churches in the UK and Ireland to support the mission of the Anglican Church in Paraguay. The meeting established Mission Paraguay with the specific aims to:

Support the ministry of the Anglican Church in Paraguay, share the love of Jesus and change lives by providing funds and a volunteer work force for:

- **practical projects, usually buildings,**
- **activities with children and young people,**
- **community based work to relieve hardship and encourage self-sufficiency.**

The mission of the Paraguayan church is in three areas of the country:

- Asunción, the capital,
- Concepción, a town of over 80,000 inhabitants, located on the eastern bank of the Rio Paraguay, 460km north of the capital where there is very considerable poverty and social deprivation,
- The Chaco, a large, sparsely populated, arid scrubland area suffering the effects of rapid deforestation providing home to indigenous Indian communities who were originally hunter gatherers. These are amongst the poorest and most marginalised communities in South America. Many are now forced to supplement their livelihood as labourers on the cattle ranches that have encroached upon their dwindling natural forest homeland.

During the past 13 years, through the generosity of individual supporters, churches and other organisations, a total of over **£252,000** has been donated for our mission work in Paraguay. We are humbled by the generosity of our Lord and his people. **26** teams comprising **226** Mission Paraguay volunteers have visited Paraguay at their own expense to work with members of local churches on a wide variety of building projects which Mission Paraguay has funded including:

- 10 new brick-built churches,
- a variety of church extensions such as toilet blocks and vestries,
- a new diocesan retreat centre,
- sinking wells and building below ground rainwater storage tanks in the Chaco,
- construction of simple brick-built homes for families living in makeshift huts.



A youth service at Zeballos Cue, Asunción



An underground rainwater storage tank under construction behind a new church being built in the Chaco



An Indian home in the Chaco. A new brick house was provided for the family

Over recent years our work has broadened considerably to utilise the specific skills and expertise of volunteers to react to specific needs and requests including:

- work with children and young people,
- leading sewing and craft workshops,
- distributing clothing and spectacles donated in the UK,
- providing materials to families for self-build home improvements.



Spectacle distribution at Concepción. Zuny from San Pablo Church who regularly distributes spectacles assists with the selection by a man who reads his Bible to aid his choice



An Indian lady threads a needle to aid her spectacle selection

Accommodation for volunteer teams is provided by local churches and communities thus enabling the formation of friendships which cross language and cultural divides. Working together provides mutual support and interdependence. Mission Paraguay is not just about providing resources and help it is very much about building relationships, changing lives and strengthening Christian faith.

For several years we have funded the toy library operating from FEISA the Anglican teacher training college based in Asunción. On a regular basis the toy library visits different communities on the outskirts of the city to enable children with few toys of their own the opportunity to learn through play, hear Bible stories and learn about Jesus. We are committed to continue to fund the toy library throughout 2020.

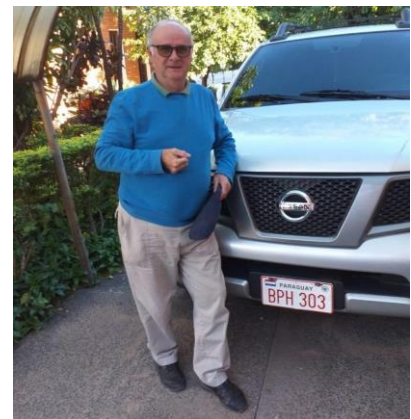


The toy library in operation

Following their visit in August 2018, the team of builders from Annaghmore in Northern Ireland were planning to return to the Chaco in 2020 to build a church at Caroa'i in the La Patria community. The area is accessed via approximately 80km of earth road which is impassable during wet weather. Church members have been without a building for worship or for other community events. As with previous churches we will be providing guttering and a means of collecting and storing rainwater for the locality which has no piped water supply. Unfortunately, this visit is no longer possible, but the new church will still be constructed using local labour. The prefabricated metal structural framework for the church has recently been manufactured but owing to the current travel restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic, cannot be transported to the Chaco. The work will be supervised by missionary Chris Hawksbee who has worked for many years amongst the Indian communities to provide pastoral support and encourage self-sufficiency. Chris travels from his home in Asunción to the Chaco on a regular basis; a return journey of approximately 800 km. Recently SAMS Ireland funded a replacement vehicle for Chris' use and Mission Paraguay was pleased to contribute towards its purchase.



The new church at Caroa'i nearing completion



Chris with his replacement vehicle

In August 2018 the Annaghmore team built an education centre at Rio Verde in the Chaco which has provided the venue for training pastors and assistants from the Chaco churches. In a recent prayer update Chris wrote of his encouragement by the degree of participation.

We give thanks that last year 620 people were confirmed in La Patria community.



A training session for local pastors at the education centre at Rio Verde

During 2020 and into next year, Mission Paraguay funds will also be providing:

- a budget for various repairs and improvements to diocesan properties,
- significant contributions towards the cost of theological training,
- a budget for children and youth work at the Luque Church, Asunción,
- a quantity of Spanish Language St. John's Gospels to be taken and distributed by future teams from SAMS Ireland visiting Paraguay and other South American countries to work with the local churches,
- building materials for small self-help projects for families living in inadequate housing.



Rocio, a member of Zeballos Cue Church outside her home at Ipvu, on the outskirts of Asunción which was built by her family using materials donated by Mission Paraguay



Housing on the side of the small river behind Rocio's home

The last consignment of clothes, medical items and second-hand spectacles from Mission Paraguay, transported with the help of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, arrived in Paraguay at the end of 2018 and has now been distributed to needy families. To date over 8,000 pairs of spectacles have been provided for people unable to afford to visit an optician. We are grateful to Silvia Torres who lives in Paraguay. Silvia provides valuable assistance in collecting and arranging distribution of all items sent via containers and supporting volunteer teams in very many ways. Thanks are also due to Bishop Peter Bartlett and members of the Anglican Church in Paraguay for their hospitality and support and to Rev. Stephen McElhinney and colleagues at SAMS Ireland for their encouragement and work in managing our funds.



A consignment of medical items for distribution



A church based sewing workshop

No further volunteer team visits are being planned by Mission Paraguay although financial support will continue. Future donations for the ministry of the church in Paraguay should be sent to SAMS Ireland, 1 Irwin Crescent, Lurgan, Craigavon, Northern Ireland. BT66 7EZ.



Grateful thanks are expressed to everyone who supports our work through your prayers and generosity.

Please pray for:

- The ongoing work of the Anglican Church in Paraguay amongst communities in Asunción, Concepción and the Chaco.
- For God's guidance for all of those involved in the selection and appointment of the next Bishop of Paraguay following the recent retirement of Bishop Peter Bartlett.
- For the Lord's blessing and healing hand to be upon Claire Holmes from Northern Ireland who works in Concepción but returned to Northern Ireland at the end of 2019 for medical treatment.
- For safety in travel and guidance for Chris Hawksbee in his ministry to the Chaco communities.
- For Bev Richardson, a former Mission Paraguay volunteer now working for the church in Asunción; and for Tim Curtis and Beryl Baker who have worked for very many years to support the Chaco communities.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour serving the Lord.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Share with God's people who are in need.

Romans 12 v11-13

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