

BERYL BAKER'S MARCH COMMUNICATION 05/03/08
(sent when she came to Asuncion to return visiting nurse Ruth Pitman to the airport)

We are very pleased that we now find new ways to communicate more widely, more effectively, and more cheaply. If you do know of anyone who receives Beryl's messages via snail-mail, but could receive them via the e-mail of another person, that would be ideal. We try to avoid a "twin track" service, yet allow that some people don't relate to computers.

Beryl described her time with Ruth as "super", even though the torrential rain most days curtailed the travelling to patients. Ruth appeared also to have been bitten extensively by mosquitoes, but the visit was a great success, and Beryl will miss her company. We hope to hear some of the story from Ruth herself soon. For much of the time they were dealing with cases of **tuberculosis** – a big eye-opener for Ruth. The T.B. programme still has no medicine for children, but Beryl has been promised a small supply.

To add to the T.B. there is an outbreak of **yellow fever**. There is so far no danger in the Chaco, but a massive vaccination campaign is under way. El Dorado has been bitten several nights running by vampire bats as they return for more of his equine blood. To complete one's image of Paraguay, late night tele-viewers could watch "Tropic of Capricorn" at **11.50 p.m. on Thursday 6th.March.**(BBC 2). We saw it last Sunday on its first transmission. The Paraguay section is near the end, and portrays the country in a realistic, yet unflattering, light.

Better news is that the most recent container with goods for Beryl's work arrived in Asuncion complete and ready for her to use. Her store-room was bulging, but need will soon empty it.

Furthermore, land-based (snail-mail) is still non-existent for all the missionaries, and no-one knows why. If you know of anyone who has sent in this manner, don't let their expectations rise.

We had further good news via Tim Curtis when he visited on February 17th. He was able to give us another source of information about life in the Chaco, as well as presenting visual material, including video scenes, of worship in the churches in the Chaco. It was a relief to find that the electricity bills, the first of which was feared, were quite containable. Formerly the source of energy had been the ever more expensive oil. By great good fortune the supply lines have now been extended

southwards from the Mennonite colonies in Filadelfia to cover the 100 km. gap in the line. The source is the Itaipu dam, until recently the largest hydro-electric project in the world, supplier of the great majority of Paraguay's electricity and the source of water shows no sign yet of drying up. This does not mean to say that climate change is not observed.

Fortunately **the cathedral in Asuncion** is now completed (due in part to Rhett Butler) and used all the time. The evening service is primarily for young people – in their language and in their style. It's very lively, and does excellent work to attract young people. Two new teachers have joined the staff at the **San Andrés College** but this form of outreach to the people of Paraguay is still very demanding.

Progress on a **website** concept is now positive, stimulated by the offer of someone who has had practical experience of the SAMS website. The plan is to feature Beryl, Tim Curtis, and the work of the Assistant Bishop and Claire Holmes (SAMS Ireland) among young people in the Eastern part of the Chaco. Beryl's area is in the West, adjacent to Argentina.

There is a need to have news, updated regularly, to maintain links that have spread over more than three decades. Yet there is also a need to tell those who might even just “surf” in that area the fundamentals about the work which normally doesn't feature, for her supporters by now know it thoroughly. We have seen evidence that the recent publicity has had its effects.

Topics of prayer will always be for the fragile youngster of Paraguay – **democracy**. In addition Beryl asks for prayer for **Wilma**, an 8-year old at the nearby settlement of Jerusalem (part of Sombrero Piri,) whose T.B. means she weighs as much as a four-year-old. She needs a lot of T.L.C., but Beryl's willingness is limited by all the other demands on her work. **Jose**, one half of the husband and wife team who are permanent house-sitters for Beryl in Asuncion, needs a brain scan and is far from well. Finally, but not least, we pray that Ruth's visit may have made Beryl aware that things will not, and cannot, go on for ever. There is a new model of operating and a new person or persons to carry forward the work done for more than 30 years by Beryl. We don't know who or where, but we support the search.

Len Hollingsworth