

Prayer letter from Patrick & Rosie Butler in Asunción, Paraguay

Dear all,

Life, (that little thing we muddle through as best we can each day!) is busy but generally okay at the moment. It is already a year since our return to Paraguay and four months since our last newsletter, so time to bring you up to date with our news.

Our **Sunday evening services** have been a real encouragement recently. With new people coming along each week and our young leaders giving of their best as they lead, preach and play in the worship band, there is a level of energy, creativity and love for God that has really taken us by surprise. Most of our young people are university students and we have a strong sense of training up a new generation of leaders (four of whom have either studied theology, are studying theology or really want to study theology). We are not a large congregation (around forty of us most Sundays) but we are forming a strong community that is growing in faith and one that we pray will begin to respond effectively to the many needs around us.

For Rosie and me this new church is probably the most exciting and demanding area of our ministry and thanks to Elaine, a teacher from the school, who is BRILLIANT with our kids, we can both be fully involved on Sunday evenings. Looking back, I would say our 24/7 prayer week had a lot to do with this new lease of life and the verse that keeps coming to mind is the one from Revelation, "Behold I make all things new."

Please pray for us to delegate wisely, encourage constantly, and look for opportunities for our leaders to get the training and experience they need - in particular Karen, Norman, Donald, Sofi, Edu and David. Remember too Raquel as she comes to the end of her two years of theological studies in Chile and is wanting to work with our church on her return.

The **English Chapel** on Sunday mornings continues to go well. It is a transient congregation (two families return to the States this week, for example) so we can be as many as 35 adults or as few as 15. But it is proving to be a real watering-hole for English speakers who are here on business, in mission, or just passing through. I also have contact with the British community - Paraguayans of British ancestry (many of whom came to work on the railways at the turn of last century) who are very pleased that 'their' chapel (which they rarely attend) now has an ordained minister! The point of contact is usually a relative who has died and I am learning what a privilege it is to come alongside people in their moment of need with a gospel of grace and the offer of new life in Christ.

Thanks for your prayers regarding the '**what to do about EJE**' decision mentioned in our last newsletter. In the end we decided to keep it as an interdenominational movement as we felt there is so much that is good coming from Catholics and Evangelicals worshipping and serving God together. For the first time recently we held a retreat just for the team to which over a hundred attended, and whilst we continue to oversee EJE the coordinating team is now basically running the programme. So almost a decade on EJE continues to be used by God to touch many

lives.

Please pray for the next EJE weekend on the 7th and 8th of June.

Louis's case finally came to trial in March. You may remember I have been visiting Louis (26 years old) in prison for the past year and that he was arrested for smuggling cocaine into Paraguay three years ago. Friend and colleague Liz was with Louis at the trial and was very impressed with the way it was all handled. The prosecuting lawyer spoke to her beforehand wanting to find out about Louis and his background, and then during the trial seemed to do all he could to help him. Liz said the newly built courtrooms were well equipped, the judges friendly, and that Louis was treated with real respect throughout. He was given the minimum sentence of five years which, with time off for good behaviour, means he could be released within the next four months.

Whilst all this is good news, Louis finds the whole idea of release a real pressure. He is essentially happy in prison and has undergone a real personal and spiritual transformation through a discipleship programme run by the Mennonite church. But he is unsure as to his next moves. He has to leave Paraguay but doesn't want to return to South Africa where he is from. As he has a British passport an option we are considering is for him to go to the UK. Andy, who used to visit Louis in prison before returning to the UK last year, is currently looking at all the resettlement and training options and will be an important link for Louis should he choose that option.

Please pray for Louis and for Andy during these next few months, and for all of us involved in working out this next stage in his life.

Home life at present can only be described as varied and entertaining! Whilst Jess and Johnny are much the same as when we last wrote, Luke has undergone some significant changes. Now as tall as me and working out in a gym, he has recently had the good fortune to become an expert on just about everything. Along with this rare gift of knowledge he has developed an acute sense of justice and, as I try to remind myself, we must count ourselves fortunate to have someone in the house who can point out our many shortcomings in this area. Whoever said teenagers are nature's revenge knew what they were talking about! At the moment Luke seems to spend much of his time dressed in a smart suit and attending lavish parties. Fifteenth birthdays for the girls here are a huge deal (when they come of age) and parents tend to spend more on these than they do on a wedding! With fourteen girls in his class and most of these parties starting at 10pm we're getting used to providing the 2am taxi service. As far as we can tell Luke's studies are going okay but we will only really know when he takes his IGCSE exams this October and next May. Just for the record we do still like him and he is fun to have around.

Please pray for us over the whole question of education. If we are to continue in Paraguay we will need to find ways of handling 'A levels' (or equivalent) so that Luke can go on to a UK university. At this stage we are unclear as to the best way forward.

The Colorado Party which has ruled Paraguay for the past sixty-two years LOST

the elections in April. As from July we will be in the hands of Fernando Lugo of the **Radical Patriotic Party for Change**. Lugo is an ex-Catholic Bishop who rose to prominence 18 months ago when he led a demonstration for land rights. He used to be a missionary in Ecuador and was then Bishop in one of the poorest regions of Paraguay for ten years. He seems to be a capable, measured man and we are intrigued to see how it will all work out. As much as the election results themselves, the big surprise was the way the Colorado candidate, Blanca Ovelar, (who stood to become Paraguay's first woman president) graciously accepted defeat. Real signs of democracy, and the press seem genuinely hopeful that the new government will bring badly needed change to this country.

Please pray for a smooth hand over of power in July, and for Lugo and his new government.

The diocese holds a synod on the 31st May to decide on the possible appointment of **a new diocesan bishop**. *Peter and Sally Bartlett* were SAMS mission partners in Bolivia for fourteen years and visited Paraguay a few weeks ago. Please pray that the church would know wisdom and a sense of God's leading on that day, and for Peter and Sally.

We will be sad to see *Tony and Chris Somervell* return to the UK in July after twenty years here, as well as *Penny and Murray Metcalfe* in December after ten years. These friends and colleagues have become part of our lives and we will particularly miss Penny and Murray who work with us in running the chapel. Please pray for these families as they work out God's plan for this next stage in their lives.

Lastly, **SAMS** is currently in the process of talks with **CMS** (The Church Mission Society) with a view to a **possible merger**. This won't affect our role here in Paraguay for the immediate future and could lead to some interesting new links with churches in Africa and the Far East where CMS is involved. Please pray for these two agencies as they discern how they can best serve God's purposes in world mission.

So that's all for now. Rosie's mum and dad are settling back in the UK and very pleased with their new house near Winchester. It will be good to see them there when we are back on leave in December. As for our own plans, at present we have a sense of being in the right place at the right time and doing the right thing so we'll press on for now. The challenge ahead will be the children's education but we trust in God's faithfulness and know from experience that he rarely shows us beyond the next bend in the road. I guess we wouldn't need faith otherwise! Do send us your news and this comes, as always, with love from us all,

Patrick, Rosie, Luke, Jess and Johnny.

(PS. We will be based in Wimbledon once more for a couple of months from mid-December. If you know of a family-size car that might be available during that period please let us know.)