

Link Letter No.6 March 2012

Dear friends,

Today is the first day of school after the summer holidays for local children. It is still very hot, but there is a sense of new beginnings.

A good family visit

We give thanks for safe journeys, a good though very busy three weeks in England for us both, and a good and much more relaxing month for me in Sicily with my father. Our children, Jon and Sarah, are both studying hard and enjoying life at university. Jon will finish his civil engineering course in a few months, so he is exploring possibilities for his next step. We had several good visits with David's father, who has dementia and is now living in a residential home. He recognised us and enjoyed going out for a pub lunch or a walk. We are grateful for David's brother and sister-in-law in Guildford who are doing most of the work supporting him. My father is well, and we enjoyed our time together in his lovely flat right by the sea in Siracusa.

Lucrecia

We have asked for prayer for Lucrecia, a lovely young Wichí

Synod discussion... (David in the background!)



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David and Shelley Stokes
CMS mission partners
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woman and youth group leader in Misión Chaqueña. Results of her pap tests had been lost, so when her cancer was discovered it was well established. She died on February 14. She leaves her husband Donato and three children aged around 5, 7 and 12.

Encouraging news in Juárez

When we left for England we were concerned about the larger Wichí church in Barrio Obrero in Juárez, which has been subject to leadership disputes. On our return we were delighted to find the various leaders are clearly making an effort to work together and God has been blessing their efforts. Also, the leader of the ladies group, who has not been well, has handed on her role to someone else, with encouraging effects.

Challenges for the Diocese post synod

Thank you for your prayers for last November's synod. Nick Drayson was made Diocesan Bishop after a number of years of interim measures. The meetings were very constructive and a list of suggestions for action is now in the hands of the Diocesan Council to work out priorities for the next few years. One big challenge will be for the new Council to learn how to work effectively together.

The criollo and indigenous ways of doing business and taking decisions are very different! Perhaps an even bigger challenge will be for CoPA (the Pastoral Commission for the Aboriginal churches) to work out how to represent effectively the very varied needs of the indigenous churches to the

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Diocesan Council. Isidro Vilte, main translator of the Wichí Bible and pastor, is heading up CoPA. Bishop Nick will need much wisdom in guiding this process.

Some personal goals for this year

The efforts involved in settling in last year, as well as the difficult climate, left us both tired and drained by the end of the year. One of our goals for this year is to make better use of time off, to exercise, and to plan in holiday time. Another aim is to deepen our understanding of Wichí language and culture. Working in Wichí is still very tiring. We can understand some people easily, but others speak with a different accent, or mumble, and we struggle to understand anything!

Our work this year

David's role in leadership training, alongside Rene's long term work here, is in the process of being worked out. Meanwhile, one particular task David has this year is to help on a revision of the Wichí prayer/hymnbook – *Lhatenekhi* (literally: our hymn container!). A consultation with a group of established and younger leaders in early March starts this process. One issue will be to come to an agreement about whether the old services for Morning Prayer and Holy Communion need changing, and whether new services need to be included. (At present the old services are mainly used by the older generation!) Then there is the question of which of the old hymns and choruses to retain, and whether new ones can be included. Finally there is the matter of finding a version of the Wichí language which is acceptable across the Diocese – or even whether some of the content should be in Spanish. Pray for wisdom and courage for the group eventually tasked with this!

We will be doing six five-day trips to various zones as a couple as part of this task, and the ongoing process of getting to know people, listening and pastoral care, and some teaching. Shelley will also be involved in planning and leading two women's conferences with Catherine.

Points for praise and prayer

- Give thanks for a useful visit to see family – prayers appreciated for them as well!
- Pray for Lucrecia's family and for improved medical services in rural communities
- Praise for encouraging changes in the Barrio Obrero church
- Give thanks for a good synod. Pray for wisdom for +Nick

in guiding the Diocesan Council and Isidro in heading up a more representative and effective CoPA

- For wisdom to know how to approach work on the revision of the Lhatenekhi (Wichí prayer/hymnbook)
- For a better work/rest balance for us both this year.

With our love,

David and Shelley



Top: Bishop Nick's installation
Bottom: Shelley with David's father



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