

Link Letter no. 3 May 2011

Dear friends,

Thank you for all your responses to our last link letter and for your prayers and support! Shelley noticed several days ago that it is five months since we arrived in Argentina. Our house in Juárez is now feeling like home – last week we finally managed to install a washing machine after the room it needed to go in had its walls and floor repaired. The extreme heat of summer is thankfully over; autumn has been pleasantly cool, and sometimes quite wet and muddy.

Trip for a meeting

This last month we have done a number of trips to Wichí-speaking communities. On one trip, a group of 16 of us travelled north from here in two Toyota pick-up trucks. After three hours along dirt roads we reached Lote 8, which has a sizeable Wichí community. We were welcomed and greeted individually by a large crowd of people and then offered a substantial meal. For this sort of occasion, a cook produces a

meal of beef (or occasionally goat), rice or noodles and pumpkin cooked in a big pot over an open fire. We then crowded into the main Anglican church, a simple adobe building with a tin roof, for a meeting of CoPA (Pastoral Commission for the Aboriginal churches). This title makes it sound more formal than it actually is.

Because of the distances between communities it is very hard for the main leaders to meet together. What tends to happen is that these meetings are held in different locations and the leaders from that area come together with the bishop and a few others from Juárez to discuss matters. This time the main topic Bishop Nick Drayson raised was preparation for the three day conferences to be held in different centres to celebrate the arrival of the gospel via Anglican missionaries in 1911. This led to leaders from the various zones remembering the history of the coming of the gospel to their area – this is often within living memory. The meeting was fascinating but lasted over four hours, and the benches became increasingly uncomfortable!

And then a consecration...

That evening we moved across the main road to get ready for the consecration of a new Anglican church. There was a rather damp open air praise service well lead by the leader of the new congregation – David had to preach with



David and Shelley Stokes
CMS mission partners
Argentina

Consecration in Lote 8



Did you know that you can now receive link letters by email, sent as a PDF? If you would like to receive them this way, and help CMS save money, please contact jonathan.self@cms-uk.org or 01865 787527

**Mision Anglicana
Salta S/N
Ingeniero Juarez
3636 Formosa
Argentina
davidshelley.stokes@gmail.com**



Sharing mate with Rene, Ignacio and Matias

hardly any notice. Numbers of musical groups from surrounding churches had come who sang several songs or gave a short word (a relative term!).

That night 10 of us stayed in the leader's house (his children had been farmed out to relatives for the night). It rained heavily, so getting to the church for the service of dedication the following morning meant squelching through mud. The service included a historical review of how the church had come to be built, singing of many hymns, preaching from the Bishop, presentation of the team of leaders and prayer for them, followed by contributions from numbers of the visitors to encourage the new congregation.

All in all, another four hour meeting! The church politics of the occasion were complex as the original church is more traditionally Anglican and the new congregation follows newer trends of more informal services. Relations between the traditional and newer leaders had become quite strained and hence the eventual agreement of a new congregation being started.

Pascual is one of the leaders who accompanied us on that trip. He is a very active zonal pastor for the group of churches around Misión Chaqueña. He is 75 years old, and told us that he has eight children and over 50 grandchildren

With Chris and Helena in Santa María



Pascual, Wichi zonal pastor and patriarch





Cooking fish in Santa María

(he has lost another 11 grandchildren). He also has around 30 great grandchildren and even a few great, great grandchildren, and, as he says with a smile, there will be more! (This may help explain why one extended family can form the basis for a congregation!)

Our first solo trip

A few weeks later we went on our first trip visiting communities that we had known well from our time here 12 years ago. We were nervous beforehand about this nine day trip – we had rather forgotten the logistics of getting the truck ready (mud tyres in case of rain etc) and what we needed to take with us (we borrowed a wooden trunk for equipment). Thankfully the weather was good, with neither torrential rain nor serious heat.

Firstly, we travelled to Tartagal to talk with a couple who run an interdenominational seminary and who are offering to help with training for Anglican leaders and students. We then spent

several days in three different zones each with a number of congregations – Santa María, then Misión La Paz (both on the river Pilcomayo which acts as border with Bolivia and Paraguay), and finally Alto de la Sierra. The purpose of the trip was to meet as many church leaders as possible and discover what was happening now in the communities and churches.

At our first stop, Santa María, we stayed with our old friends Chris and Helena, and really enjoyed our first taste of fish from the Pilcomayo for a long time! We found that a group from a neighbouring community of San Luis were visiting. The visitors brought along a group of *danzistas* – 16 women and girls who sang and danced in the long evening service. Dance has been linked with a renewal movement in the churches, but there are accompanying problems, and leaders aren't quite sure what to do about it. We were pleased to see the visitors were accompanied by their church leaders.

Shelley with ladies from Barrio Obrero



Gifts from our trip



The old pastor in Santa María, Zebedeo, a most wonderful man of God, had been seriously ill for some time. We are very glad we were able to see him, as he went to be with the Lord on 18 April. At present it isn't clear which of three deacons should succeed him. In a number of communities we saw a tendency towards division into smaller extended family groups – which has led to requests for church annexes to be formed – and this may also happen here.

At our final stop, we got completely lost coming into the village of Alto de la Sierra. It has grown much in the last decade, and new housing has obliterated the roads we knew before! We were delighted to meet three of David's former students, now all ordained pastors, and also working well together. We arrived at 3pm and groups of people stayed talking with us for the next seven hours. Food and drink were generously provided, and we slept on a borrowed mattress in the church. It was lovely to see and hear what God has been doing despite a church split a number of years ago – a consequence of a period when the Diocese was going through a difficult time. We also visited the breakaway group to hear the old pastor – a man very much responsible for the nurturing of the three men now themselves pastors. We were sent on our way with gifts of wonderful pumpkins and melons.

Back in Juárez

Finally, some issues we are facing when in Juárez. We have got into the pattern of attending services on Saturday and Sunday nights at the criollo (Spanish-speaking) church which is so close to our house. Shelley plays violin occasionally in the music group and David preaches once a month. We also go to the main Barrio Obrero Wichí church on Sunday mornings. At present it is quite hard to know how to get involved there because of a long-standing leadership issue – so it seems best at present simply to attend services and try to get to know people there better. Shelley goes regularly to the Monday ladies' meeting and is occasionally asked to speak.

Our roles?

We will be doing about one trip a week for the next few months, usually together but sometimes separately.

Shelley will continue to work with Catherine, Bishop Nick's wife, and several Wichí ladies to organise conferences for women in various parts of the Diocese. She is preparing her talk for a conference April 30-May 2. Things never go quite as planned, but meetings with Wichí women are always interesting and good learning experiences.

David will be travelling to different areas of the Diocese with Bishop Nick and also with his colleague René Pereyra. This is really to get a clearer grasp of what is now happening and get to know some of the many new leaders. Answers to the questions of what his role should be, and how Bishop Nick, René and David can best work together alongside present church leaders, should begin to emerge as this year progresses.

This Easter we will be in Misión Chaqueña for the first centenary celebration. May God help each of us in our different contexts to remain faithful to the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Points for praise and prayer

- Thanks for good first visits to Wichí communities.
- Thanks for good ongoing contacts with family and friends.
- Pray for Lucrecia, the young mother, as her cancer treatment continues.
- Pray for the forthcoming centenary celebrations – roughly one per month until the end of the year.
- Pray for church leaders in zones of Santa María, Misión La Paz, and Alto de la Sierra dealing with issues of renewal and division.
- Pray for increasing clarity over our roles as this year progresses.

With our love,

David and Shelley



Church Mission Society

Watlington Road, Oxford, OX4 6BZ Tel: 01865 787400 Fax: 01865 776375
Email: info@cms-uk.org www.cms-uk.org Registered Charity Number 1131655
Executive Director: The Rev Canon Tim Dakin