



Link Letter no. 3 February 2012

Dear friends,

Christingle

At Beryl Baker's suggestion, we held a Christingle in San Mateo on Sunday 25 December. What a brilliant idea; the number of children attending the morning services has more than doubled since we were in the UK. But on Christmas morning they were all occupied with no health and safety worries. Children here grow up with open fires and treat them with due respect, so candles don't present a problem. We had an excellent turn out. We used the angel's announcement: "*A Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord*", together with the Christingle symbols to provide a simple way to present the Good News.

We were particularly delighted to see Juan Fransisco, his wife Juana, and all bar one of their six children. It was a year since Juan and Juana first came to San Mateo, but on that occasion their children didn't come. For most of the year they had been

Ed and Marie Brice
CMS mission partners
Paraguay

away working on a ranch some 150 miles north. The only member of the family who wasn't there on Christmas morning was their eldest son Oscar, aged 30 something, one of the two motorbike mechanics in the community. Oscar lives in Río Verde in his parent's house although it is increasingly difficult to find him at home. Ed has been visiting him since 2009. He always listens with respect and attention as Ed reads some verses from the Bible and prays.

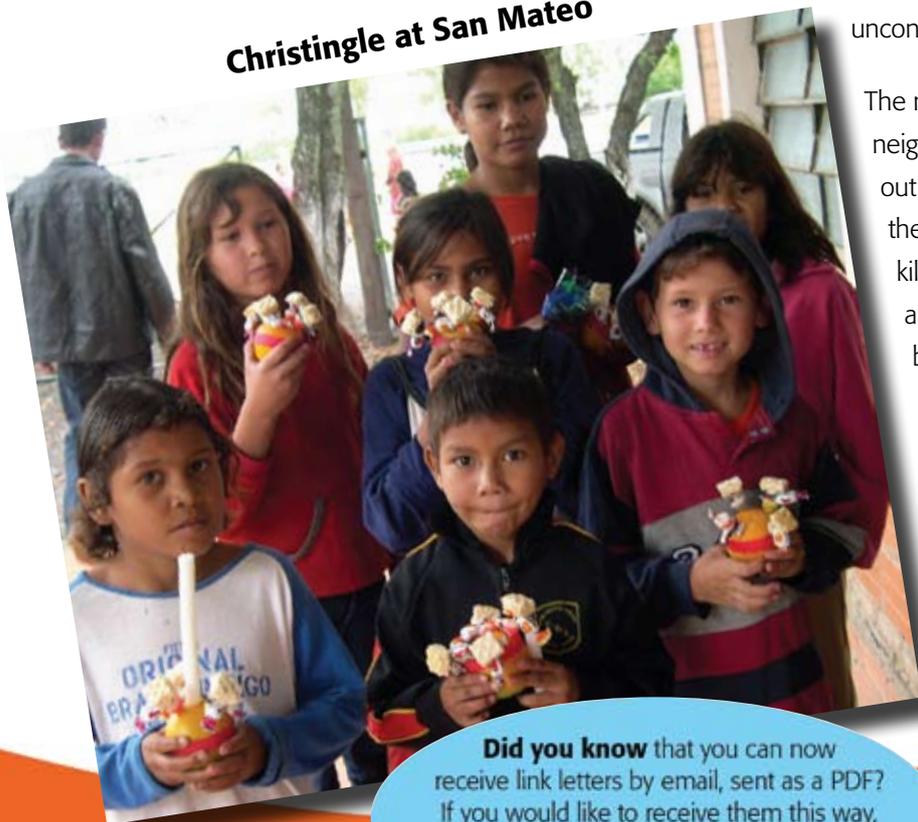
A miraculous recovery

On a visit a week earlier Ed heard that, while we were away in the UK, Oscar had a bad motorbike accident. Like the majority of motorcyclists outside the city, Oscar doesn't use a crash helmet. The last thing he can remember was travelling the dirt road late one morning, on the way to a ranch 30kms away. Some three hours later he was found, 2km further along the road, unconscious on the ground by his motorbike.

The motorcyclist who discovered him went to a neighbouring ranch to raise the alarm and they sent out a truck to bring him back. He was taken from the ranch on the back of a police truck 70 or so kilometres to the regional health post to wait for the ambulance. He arrived at 7:30 pm, still unconscious, but the ambulance didn't come for another two hours! Oscar eventually reached the Major Accident Hospital in Asunción at 2am! He had a fractured skull, collarbone and two broken ribs and was unconscious in the Intensive Care unit for three more days.

Nobody had much hope of him living let alone recovering. But, against the odds, Oscar was

Christingle at San Mateo



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Iglesia Anglicana
Casilla 1124
Asunción
PARAGUAY
ebrice@tigo.com.py



Worship at the 'King of kings' church



Pastor Elvio and wife Lorenza at home

released from hospital some 20 days later and returned to Río Verde. He is now working and rushing around as if nothing had happened, but he does confess to suffering from headaches and irritability, and has been warned that he could have blackouts. He is deeply aware that his life hung by a thread and that but for God's grace his situation could be very different. As if to underline the point the first health professional to aid Oscar after his accident, a nurse in Río Verde, was tragically killed when the vehicle she was driving had a blow out on the way down to Asunción the last Friday of 2011.

On the first Sunday of the year Juan and Juana were in church again, this time Oscar was with them along with his three brothers. Together we gave thanks to God for Oscar's miraculous recovery. Please pray, with us, that Oscar and his family will soon discover that God's offer of life and salvation has dimensions which go far beyond physical health.

Breaking new ground...

One of the ideas that was mooted last year when meeting with Bishop Peter was that the Río Verde conferences could possibly be

repeated in other centres so as to overcome the limitation that our lack of sleeping accommodation presents. To Ed this had seemed a vague future possibility so we were a little taken aback when the Bishop suggested we go ahead and plan along those lines this year. One of the possible centres would be Makxawáya (for many years know as the Central Mission) so when we visited pastors Juan and Romualdo at the end of December we asked them what they thought. At first they didn't think there would be much interest in the surrounding communities but then they remembered that Albino Fernández was visiting from his home community of San Fernando (some 30km North of Makxawáya). Romualdo, who with his brother, ex-Bible Translator Martín, have family links with this community, said that the thriving churches there have little teaching.

When we talked with Albino he told us of eight other leaders in three different churches there and he felt sure that they would be interested in such a conference held in Makxawáya. There were at least two other communities to

Albino Fernandez praying with other church leaders while visiting Makxawáya





María Mercedes (Ramón's mum) with daughters and grandchildren preparing Christmas dinner in Río Verde



Ramón and Virginia, María Magdalena and Salomón and Víctor

the South West of Makxawáya that they thought might be interested too. Further indication that this could be a way forward came when Ed met with pastor Elvio in Yatnata/La Herencia early in the New Year.

Elvio

In addition to the job he was contracted to do in the Ministry of Education, last year Elvio was asked to take on as a temporary measure the post as administrative supervisor for Indian schools in an area of the Southern Chaco. Unfortunately, this temporary measure has now dragged on for a year and has meant that not only has Elvio been unable to do the job he was employed for, but that he has also been unable to dedicate the time he had planned to the church he is responsible for in Yatnata/La Herencia.

As we talked he expressed his hope that this would soon be resolved – please pray that it will. Then came the bombshell! He said that once he has been relieved of the responsibility of administrative supervisor, he would like to hold conferences for the church leaders in the three centres away from Río Verde (El Estribo, La Patria and Makxawáya) on some of his free weekends! He was hoping that the Bible Studies Manual (SEAN material) we had translated into Enxet and produced in trial edition last year would form the basis of these conferences. All this seems to be too much of a coincidence. Please pray with us as we seek to move these ideas forward. Basically pray that God will guide us as to when, where, what content and who should be teaching?

Río Verde to Remansito... and back

Remansito is a sprawling, scruffy, new, growing town on the West (Chaco) banks of the Río Paraguay, acting like a sandwich between the river and the junction of the main roads from Argentina

(southwest), Bolivia (northwest) and the bridge which connects them with Asunción some 20km away. Were it not for the regular grid system of the mud streets and house plots it could be mistaken for a shanty town. The 'Rey de reyes' (King of kings) church, one of many scattered through the town, was the place Pastor Lucho had chosen for us to meet with the 'Visiting Team' last Wednesday night. The regular church service was to start at 8pm so we would meet beforehand. Víctor, one of the team, who lives on the east side of the river would be waiting by the main road at 7pm; we were to pick him up on the way. Pastor Lucho also has responsibility for two congregations on that side of the river.

At 5pm, I received a call from Lucho to say that he wasn't going to be able to come to the meetings, as he had hadn't been able to shake off the flu, and could I please take the service! This would be our first visit to a service in the King of kings church but we needn't have worried. On our arrival at the church, Ramón Caballero, the caretaker, brought out chairs and arranged them in the area outside the church door where the air was cooler. Some musicians were already practicing for the service inside. As we waited for the other members of the visiting team to arrive, we chatted with Ramón and his wife, Virginia. Ramón is the eldest of a large family of mostly girls. His mother (María Mercedes) and several of his sisters live in Río Verde. It is because of Ramón that we have had for a number of years an opening to share the gospel in that family. So I was keen to learn how Ramón came to know Jesus.

When he moved to Remansito from the Chaco he was befriended by Salomón González who shared the gospel with

him. Salomón, a policeman, and his wife María Magdalena had come to Christ through San Mateo while living in Río Verde; they moved to Remansito 14 years ago. With their children, they are active members of the King of kings church. Recently Salomón was moved to a job which means that he is free at weekends and has made a commitment to make monthly visits to Río Verde to help out at San Mateo. So he and Víctor are the main members of the visiting team.

As we listened to Ramón's story, people began to gather for the evening service and we were introduced to them. It was beginning to get dark and Solomón and his wife arrived with one of their daughters and it was clear that it was time for the service to start and that our meeting of the visiting team wasn't going to happen. However the evening service did provide an opportunity for the congregation to pray for Solomón and Víctor in their regular visits to Río Verde.

Victor

Victor is committed to making two visits a month to San Mateo and he has two or three companions who take it in turns to go with him. On his most recent visit two weeks ago, he took Antonio, an older man who came to Christ recently as a result of being healed of kidney stones and who for many years worked on a ranch in the Chaco. It was immediately clear how these two men were able to reach families who in the past we couldn't communicate with because of their lack of Spanish.

Please pray for Víctor and Salomon and their companions on their regular visits, that we will work out ways to coordinate

their work and complement the different gifts. With the team committing themselves to visit three weekends a month, Ed will be free to visit Indian communities on those weekends. Pray that he makes good use of these visits and for the plans for Marie and Jasmin's visits too.

Praise the Lord for:

- The visiting team (Victor, Salomon and companions) and the results of their hard work seen in increased numbers in San Mateo.
- The Christingle service and the greater participation of the children.
- Oscar's remarkable recovery and its impact on his family.
- The contacts made through the 'King of kings' church.
- The interest among Indian church leaders in expanding the conferences to more centres.
- The opportunity for some holiday in Chile.

Pray for:

- The coordination of the visiting team's activities and the finances to cover the visits.
- Juan Fransisco, Juana and family, especially Oscar.
- Pastor Elvio to be relieved of his 'temporary' post and free to serve where he is most needed.
- Organizing this year's conferences.
- Planning weekend visits and visits to work with children.

In Christ

Ed and Marie

Victor and Antonio preparing for a morning visiting in Río Verde



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

