



Ed and Marie Brice
CMS mission partners
Argentina

One of CMS's longest serving mission partners, Ed and Marie have recently moved from Paraguay to Tartagal in Northern Argentina after 30 years serving the Enxet people group within the Chaco of Paraguay. Ed and Marie have taken on the pastoral oversight of the Anglican Church in Tartagal and will work in the northern area of the Chaco.

Link Letter No.5 April 2013

Dear friends,

Last year, when we made our first trip to Tartagal, we were surprised to see how many Protestant churches (of all flavours) there were in the town. Just over a month after we moved, Ed was invited to the twice monthly meetings of the pastors' fraternity. Once again the welcome received was heart warming. The meetings continued through the holiday season (January and February) despite low attendance, and it provided a good opportunity for Ed to get to know some of the leaders better.

Unity...

One matter of concern to the pastors was that the evangelist Carlos Annacondia plans to hold a campaign in the city later in the year, but apparently some of the city pastors show little interest in overcoming the mutual suspicions that exist. Annacondia, like other well known evangelists, insists that the churches work together. In fact, he has made it a condition of his undertaking a campaign. A representative of his organisation (The Message of Salvation Christian Mission) came to visit the city towards the end of February and after meeting with the pastors decided to give a conditional go ahead. The final decision, to undertake the 10-day campaign, planned for 15-25 August, will be taken when they visit again on 25 April. As a result there has been a marked

change in the atmosphere within meetings. Anticipation and expectancy of what God will do are almost palpable, as every effort is made to encourage the different churches to participate and contribute with manpower and financially. There is a special concern that the churches in the Indian communities (remember there are seven different Indian ethnic groups in the city) should not be left out. Ed has been asked to talk with the leaders and members of one of them, the church in the Wichi suburb called Lapacho 2.

Renewal within the Wichi communities

Our first impressions of Lapacho 2 were of a church on its last legs. However, the first service Ed attended provided a pleasant corrective. As with most Wichi



*The Anglican church in the Wichi community
- Lapacho 2*

communities, there is lots of interaction with family members living in other communities and on that Sunday a contingent from the Pacará community, some 30 miles to the east where the zonal pastor lives, were visiting. A subsequent visit with Marie initially seemed to confirm the first impressions. Leader Osvaldino, who has suffered from ill health since the death of his wife last year, and no longer takes an active part in the services, couldn't seem to find the key to open the church. However, everybody's patience was eventually rewarded and again we were surprised as the empty seats were occupied and different people contributed to the worship. Please pray for Osvaldino and the congregation, that they will join in the preparations for and find encouragement in the Annacondia campaign.



Asociacion members, Zacarias and Claudia, visit the Wichi community Traslado.



A few of the protestant church buildings used by some of the 40 or 50 different congregations

Santa María is another, much larger Wichi community (its population is approximately 600). It is one of the many communities stretched along the length of the Pilcomayo River, about 80 miles to the north east of Tartagal. It is also one of the communities within the fiscal plots 14 and 55 still waiting (since 1991!) for the provincial government to fulfil its promise to give the Indians the titles to this land in accordance with the National Constitution. At the invitation of Chris and Elena Wallis, who work with the Anglican Church based in this community, Ed made a five-day visit during February. This gave him an opportunity to meet members of the local church (Pastor Angel Dixon, and lay leaders Nica, Zeferino and others) and other pastors within the zone, including the zonal pastor Elías from San Luis community. He also began to hear about the things that concern them, and see the new Abundant Life course in Wichi in action.

Not too different from the large Indian communities we knew in Paraguay, Santa María is really a conglomeration of many smaller units which all too easily split and fracture. With vision and good spiritual leadership, the church can exert a strong unifying influence but there is always the tendency for the smaller units to want to demonstrate their independence by establishing breakaway groups. During Ed's time in the community every night, one or other of the different groups held what they call *a campaña*, which consists of loud amplified music with Christian lyrics accompanied by dancing into the early hours and usually some exhortation or "prophecy". Many of the same young people and adults would attend

each night wherever the gathering was organised. Rather than encouraging people in their Christian lives, these meetings often induce fear and further division. This style of meeting has been on the increase for some time.

Fighting for Indian rights

In the same area, just 12 miles further south east, is Santa Victoria Este – the centre of local government, with its hospital, municipality, police station and

a non-Indian population of about 4,000 people. This is where two other members of the Asociana team live, Jose and his wife Zulma and their two children, and Susana and her husband Gabriel. So, while Ed was there, he was able to hear first hand from Susana some of the challenges the land rights process is currently facing. As part of the process of giving the Indians the titles to the land, the non-Indians (Criollos), who are currently also occupying fiscal land, will receive titles too, provided they can give sufficient evidence to support their claim. However, in order to fulfil the constitution, the Indians have insisted that the non-Indians should receive their land in one block which means that many of them will have to move. The provincial government has promised financial help for this process. On the journey to Santa Maria from Tartagal, Chris pointed out the first fence being erected by one of the Criollos in the new area. Some are in agreement with the arrangement but by no means all.

The Asociana team is currently suffering a funding crisis, in part due to the international financial crisis and the government's policy of setting an artificially low rate of exchange for the dollar. However, the team also needs to recruit someone with expertise to manage these challenges, both locally and internationally. The land rights work is in itself stressful, team members now facing the added strain due to the current financial problems and the programmes uncertain future. Please pray for the team and Ed in his pastoral role. As part of this task, Ed has made a couple of trips with the Asociana team members based in Tartagal (Zacarias and Claudia) as they visit the Wichi communities in that area. These communities are facing a different kind of challenge in their claims for land. As already mentioned, the National Constitution recognises the Indians rights to land; however, when there are other interests involved, in this case the rapidly expanding agricultural frontier, the Indian's rights are ignored. Numerous communities find that the traditional Chaco forests, which used to surround them, are being replaced by vast fields of soya beans. This is demoralising to say the least, and it is difficult to sustain any hope that Indians will receive titles to a reasonable area of traditional forest. Please pray for God given realistic objectives.

Holy Week

I suppose that strictly speaking, Palm Sunday isn't part of Holy Week and the Saturday before, but that was when a group of five young people came to our house to start the Abundant Life course. Enrique and Lilian Rigau, a mature Christian couple who live in Tartagal, have three children, all of them studying at university. The youngest, Constanza aged 21 and her boyfriend Leo, who is from a Roman Catholic background, wanted to understand better what was involved in being a Christian. Enrique suggested they study Abundant Life and we provided him with the materials so that he could be their tutor. However, Constanza said she would prefer not to do it with her dad, so they approached us. Constanza then said she had some friends she thought would like to join her. So Enrique and Lilian came along too, to introduce us to the group. There were four girls – Constanza, Emilia, Anahí and Carol, all of whom appear to have



*Skyping with our sons and grandchildren -
Javier, Aliah, Eric, Neill and IanXavier*

made some kind of Christian commitment when they were quite young and now want to recommit themselves to Christ – along with Leo. Please pray for our weekly meetings with them.

A sad incident

Being on the road from Salta to the Indian communities on the Pilcomayo, Tartagal provides a convenient place to stopover. So we have been increasingly blessed with visitors. Chris and Elena Wallis, who pass through quite regularly, planned to stay on Easter Sunday on their way to Salta. However, a sad incident on Tuesday evening changed all that...

The Santa María community where they live is divided into two parts – the Criollo settlement and the Wichi village about half a mile away. Chris and Elena had driven to the Criollo village to do some shopping. Whilst in one of the stores, Chris was greeted by the shop owner with shouts of “*Get out of here, I never want to see you here again!*” It was Fredy Maza, a Criollo with a history of long standing conflict with the Indian community. He pushed Chris out of the store before punching him to the ground and then kicking him repeatedly. Only when Elena went to his rescue was Maza restrained. Chris received treatment in the local health post and then in the hospital in Santa Victoria (a week later in Salta an X-ray revealed two broken ribs). When Chris went to the police in Santa Victoria to report the attack, they said that there were reports of large numbers of Indians gathered outside Fredy’s store in Santa Maria demanding his removal. The conflict with Fredy was made worse last year, when the Indians destroyed a fence he had erected illegally on public land. Worried that there could be further violence, and despite the obvious pain he was suffering, Chris called by the store on the way back from Santa Victoria. Surprised by just how many Indians were there, he warned them not to resort to violence, nor to touch or damage the store owner’s property. Concerned to do all they could to keep the peace and with Chris in too much pain to travel, he and Elena stayed on in Santa Maria two more days before leaving for Tartagal on Good Friday. Please pray that the authorities will act swiftly and with justice to defuse this tense situation and for the safety of Indians, Criollos and members of the team living in the area.

Residency granted!

On a happier note, we are delighted to report that Ed received notification that his permanent Argentine residence was granted on 7 March. A month before, we had a phone line installed and then an internet connection established shortly after. So we are now enjoying much easier communication, not least the delighted of seeing sons and grandchildren via Skype. Marie plans to go and visit the family in Paraguay next month and bring her mother back here for a visit. Then in July we will be visiting the UK for a month, especially to attend our son Derek’s graduation, but will be happy to visit some of our link churches on the available Sundays.

Prayer and praise

- Give thanks for a rapid resolution of our documents
- Give thanks for the pastor’s fraternity and the planned Annacondia campaign
- Give thanks for visits to different Wichi communities
- Give thanks for the New Abundant Life students
- Give thanks that the Wallis’s didn’t suffer further injury
- Give thanks for being able to receive visitors
- Give thanks for a telephone and internet connection.
- Pray for a peaceful and just resolution to the conflict between Indians and Criollos
- Pray for involvement of all the congregations in Annacondia’s campaign
- Pray for Lapacho 2 congregation and other Wichi churches in the area
- Pray for a new member for the Asociana team and the necessary adjustments
- Pray for the Abundant Life and other courses.

In Christ

Ed and Marie

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