

Newsletter: Chris and Alison Hawksbee in Paraguay

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Associate Mission Partners with the Church Mission Society (CMS) and the South American Mission Society (SAMS) UK & Northern Ireland.

Dear Friends and prayer partners.

Thank you for your continued prayers for us and sharing in the Lord's work here in Paraguay.

I can say with much joy that the brethren, Pastor Agustin and I have ministered to in the Settlements of Makthlawaiya, El Estribo and La Patria have "woken up" as they put it. They have appreciated our twice monthly visit to do Bible teaching with them and it has resulted in them working more closely together and to support each other in the church ministry. We praise God for the work of His Holy Spirit and see His hand upon the work.

In June we saw the confirmation of 58 candidates in La Patria (it should have been 130, but due to bad weather!), and the blessing of the chapel in Colonia 24 that was completed last September. Hopefully, the rest and maybe more can be confirmed before the end of the year.

Agustin and I have been concentrating on teaching the church leaders and council members, plus youth, the basics of our faith as believers in Jesus Christ. It is always good to be reminded of this. I got Pastor Juan Sosa from Makthlawaiya to do a bible study on 1 Peter 3:15, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." I gave him a list of verses and he brought out more, and gave a good study. We took him and Romualdo Rojas, a deacon from there with us to repeat the study in El Estribo and La Patria. It encouraged the brethren there too. So they were able to do the study in Enxet (Lengua) and in Guarani. The Enxet speakers really appreciated it. It also gave us an opportunity to hear how people contributed and then were able to reinforce with "input" where needed. We always encourage the participants to be active with questions and examples/ testimonies that they would like to share. This gives us a good indication of their maturity as believers.

We have had about 3 months where the weather permitted us to get in and out of the communities without road conditions interfering, but the last month has become rather rainy and preventing access. In fact, when the Bishop went into La Patria to do the confirmations, it took us 5 hours to get there and 5.5 to get out again (usually only a journey of an hour and a half). Heavy clay surfaces and rain make for difficult driving especially when tractors and big cattle trucks have left deep ruts.

Please pray for Juan Sosa and Robert Fernandez, as they get accustomed to not receiving a monthly wage from the Diocese, and that their local congregations start supporting their ministry. This is a Diocesan policy to be self-supporting. All the city churches now pay their own pastors.

The next step we ask for your prayers is for the congregations/church councils to put forward names of possible candidates for ordination as deacons and pastors. The Chaco congregations are very short of Presbyters who can do the Holy Communion, etc. Sometimes the congregations find it difficult to understand the criteria that is needed for selecting people for these ministries, sometimes they think they should name somebody from their own family in order to have someone to represent their family necessities and not thinking of the spiritual maturity of the church. With all the pastors off the Diocesan payroll, it opens the way to ordain more pastors who won't receive a wage from the Diocese. Sometimes the wage has been the reason people wanted to become pastors and then haven't done a good job of it. So, there are some challenges ahead.

I am facing some opposition from many of the community leaders in Sombrero Piri. There are a group who have rented out the community land to cattle owners for grazing. The monies from these rents goes into the leaders pockets and don't benefit the rest of the community members. It also means that community lands are being divided up by fences and their owners are being denied access to their own land for hunting, gathering and fishing. It also means that those community members who have livestock are being very much restricted as to where they can graze their cattle. There is a Government law (ley 904) which defines the activities that are allowed and which aren't allowed. Renting out the land, dividing it up, mortgaging it or selling are not permitted (article 17 of this legislation). There are many who don't like what their leaders are doing, rightly so. So, they ask me for advice as to what they can do or better said what their rights are. These I point out according to the above legislation, and the actions they can take. The long and short of it is that the leaders are denouncing me for interfering with internal affairs or rights of their traditional form of government. This isn't true, as I have never interfered with them renting out their land, but, they don't want me to tell others of the rights as it shows them up in a bad light as transgressors of the law. Please pray for those who are raising their voice against the leaders injustices and also for me, as, it can interfere with our work as Christians. We are called to be salt and light, but it can be clearly seen that those in darkness don't appreciate this. They are hiding behind the fact that they are Indigenous people with their own way of doing things!

I have 2 volunteers coming out from the UK this month to work with me in the Rio Verde area. We are due to help 2 families with their houses in the village of Tres Lagunas, within S. Piri. If the community leaders get the ruling from the local Justice of the peace to ban me from entering S. Piri these families will miss the help. There are other activities we can do in the Paraguayan Community of Rio Verde. S. Piri neighbours onto Rio Verde. Please pray for this situation.

Alison continues to teach science at St Andrew's School, quite challenging, so she please pray for her! We are still involved in St Andrew's Church, an interesting small congregation, some of whom growing in the Lord.

Love and greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chris and Alison.

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