

Introduction to the Anglican Diocese of Northern Argentina

INTRODUCTION

Argentina is the second largest country in South America and the eighth biggest in the world and to



pastorally care for a country that size can cause problems for the leadership of the church. Within the country there was a cultural divide between the established

churches of the indigenous people and the new city churches which were now growing up in many of the towns and cities.

In 1973, after a considerable growth in the urban areas, it was decided to divide the country into two separate Dioceses in order to effectively oversee the church and the six northerly provinces of Argentina became one Diocese. While a cultural divide still exists, the Church has one common purpose - to see Christ's body grow and His kingdom established in Northern Argentina.

Since this decision was made the Church in the Diocese continues to grow and with the assistance of SAMS Mission Partners, various programmes are part of the

life of the Church. Currently Bishop Humberto Axt is overseeing 127 congregations in the Chaco and Urban areas of Northern Argentina.

WHAT TYPE OF WORK IS THE CHURCH INVOLVED IN?

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The Church in Argentina began among the Wichí, Chorote and the Toba people as well as some of the smaller tribes like the Sanapa and Chunupi. These have become some of the poorest and most neglected people in South America. The work is multi-faceted among these "forgotten" people, who for generations were traditionally despised, ill-treated and exploited.

For a number of years Mission Partners have been working to translate the Bible into the language of the people. The New Testament has been completed and work is well underway in translating the Old Testament. The Bible is used to teach the people their own language, as the language was not written down until the translation work began. The Bible is therefore used as much for educational



needs as well as spiritual needs.

The Church has also responded to the physical needs of the people and assisted them in becoming independent again. This is done in two ways:

Firstly by securing land rights for the people which ensures the people cannot be forced out of their traditional territory and be exploited by land-hungry farmers.

This means they can settle down in one place and build homes without the threat of eviction.

Secondly to enable them to use their surroundings and culture to give them a means of employment to support themselves. One of the successful ways in achieving this is through the Siwok Crafts.

The Indian people are being trained to use the wood in their areas to make craft items. Letter openers, ducks and the Nativity Scene are just some of the many items which are being hand made.

These are then sold throughout the world and the money is used to support the Indian people and to train others to be self-sufficient. For SAMS personnel the physical well-being of a person is as important as the spiritual.

URBAN AREAS

Argentina is a country which is rich in natural resources but due to government mismanagement many in the country are struggling to survive. As a response to the needs of the people the Church initiated various projects and schemes to help and enable the people in urban areas.

In 1965 the first Anglican Church was planted in an urban area and the work has since mushroomed.

The work is mainly focussed around the areas of Salta and Tucumán. It is in these areas that a doctor is employed to help in the various medical problems. The rise in the cost of living means that very few can afford medical help.



Due to the current economic crisis the care of children and young adolescents is high on the agenda. As a result soup kitchens are now being set up in areas of the greatest need, with hundreds of children given meals on a regular basis. University students in Tucumán are also receiving much needed help and support in a secure and friendly environment.

Education is seen as a means to enable individuals improve their circumstances. Currently the church in

Salta has a Christian Education department and is compiling teaching resources which can be used by the local congregations.

Another way that the Church is enabling the people to help each other is to initiate “Saturday Swap Shops.” This is where people come to an event organised by the Church to exchange household items they no longer need or want for items they do. These are proving very popular not only as a means of helping the local people, but also as a way of establishing relationships.

Northern Argentina is a society which is confronted with many difficulties and problems, some of which are long-term. However the church is rising to the challenge in bringing the reality of the Gospel to a people in dire need and in circumstances which are not of their own making. The aim of the Church is therefore to bring a message which is vibrant and living, and instill renewed faith and joy in their difficult times.

It is your prayerful and financial support of these worthwhile projects which make eternal changes in the lives of the people of Northern Argentina. It is through the faithful witness of Christ's body in Northern Argentina that people have a living hope.

If you would like to discover ways to prayerfully or financially support the work of SAMS Ireland in Northern Argentina please contact:

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