

Update from Murray & Penny Metcalfe – September 2008

So much has happened since we last wrote, most of it positive – hope you've got time for a slightly longer update than usual for what will probably be our penultimate update prior to leaving. If you find our accounts too detailed, the summary is at the end as usual!

National News

The new government came to power on August 15th, witnessed by a number of neighbouring leaders such as the Presidents of Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. President Lugo's inaugural speech was moving as he promised to fight poverty and corruption. He has refused to take a salary for his position and he continues to live in his family house on the outskirts of Asuncion. There cannot be many areas of public life that are not experiencing a different style of management. Yesterday for example we heard that over 200 people working within the Itaipu Hydroelectric dam project lost their jobs because it was found that they fulfilled no function! Not surprisingly the changes have not gone down well in all quarters. On 1st September Lugo publicly spoke out on discovering a failed coup attempt led by the ex President Nicanor and General Oviedo (orchestrator of previous coup attempts). Of course this was hotly denied by those involved, claiming that Lugo had invented the claim to turn the public against them. As often happens here, it is so hard to know where the truth lies!

School News

The arrival of September ushers in the third and last term of the academic year, having just finished the second round of exams. Having celebrated Children's Day in Primary last month, September is the turn of Secondary as the start of spring and Youth Day coincide on the 21st which heralds a change of routine with special activities such as a Science Fair, Sports Day and Cultural Olympics.

Amidst all the study, the all-important daily Bible studies continue to be a key feature of school life, giving the chance to study God's Word and confront issues arising every week in their own lives or in Paraguay or other countries. In Secondary, a highlight too is our monthly worship and talk in the Anglican Cathedral next to school, led by Patrick Butler with the school worship band of 16 year-olds doing a great job.

With a week's half-term at the end of September, the second oldest class then prepares to sit International GCSE exams in October, the most important they have ever done. After a final excursion to the south of Paraguay, the class of leavers start their final round of Paraguayan exams in school which are vital, dictating the qualifications they present to universities next year. They also sit AS Level exams in Spanish Language and Literature and General Studies in English. Into November and it's final exams for all, the goal being the highest grades possible to enable them to pass to the next grade. Other Cambridge University international English exams enable students to achieve certificates at different levels in December – and so the year rounds off with end of year activities amidst the summer heat.

There is still need as ever for more English teachers, especially in Secondary for 2009 due to Murray's departure.

Esperanza News

We were delighted to once again be able to sign our special agreement with the Ministry for Children in July. We'd been told that until the new government came to power the minister would be signing nothing more, so we were thankful that she made an exception for us and that Bishop Andres was able to come down from Concepcion to do the deed on behalf of the Anglican church. The agreement will last for the next 2 years and means that we are entitled to nappies, milk and medicines from the Ministry. Sadly not everything was positive at that time. We had to ask one of the Esperanza carers to leave due to a number of problems with her attitude to her work. We were particularly disappointed as she had worked with us as a family prior to the opening of Esperanza.

Having reached July with no obvious movement in any of the children's cases, August has seen developments on all fronts, due partly we are sure to the new management in the adoption centre. Excitingly, brothers Jose and Gabriel are to be adopted by an American couple we know well as they are members of Agustin and Teresa's congregation. It is a brave move for them as they already have 2 young children. Jonathan, recently 3, is being visited by his young birth mother and we hope he will soon be able to go and live with her, perhaps with ongoing pastoral support from us. We are told that Romina is soon to go and live with her grandmother and that Mauri, whose file has finally been found, will soon be declared adoptable.

The new Minister for Children has put a new person in as Director of the Adoption Centre. She is a lawyer and has experience of working within the adoption teams. In her first week she visited Esperanza and chatted with Juana as she had been told that our "model" was ideal and one to be followed, which has definitely boosted our morale all round! Since then she has been reducing the number of babes in the Adoption Centre home pulling out all the stops to find foster families for them. She seems very pragmatic, sending her lawyers out into the courts to track the legal process of each child. In our experience this is the only way to get things moving but it is something that the previous director was against.

On the financial side of things the fall in value of the pound means that your donations are not going nearly as far as they were. This time last year we were getting around 10,000 Paraguayan guaranies to the pound but we are currently getting just over 7,000. Meanwhile prices continue to go up at an alarming rate.

We are very pleased that Pastor Agustin and his wife Teresa have agreed to take over the supervision of Esperanza very soon. They have been involved since the beginning and love this sort of pastoral ministry.

Church news

The big news within the Diocese is that Peter and Sally Bartlett have now officially been chosen for the position of Bishop here. We understand that they are hoping to come in January 2009. They worked with SAMS for many years in La Paz, Bolivia.

We continue to see new faces in our English-speaking church, recent arrivals include a Korean family working in their Embassy and the new Head of the American School and his

family. Several of us are helping on the Spanish speaking Alpha course to start on September 11th.

Short – term volunteers

The visit of around 40 volunteers in 3 different groups over July and August went well and responses were positive on all sides. We were able to move into more of a supporting role as Caroline Gilmour-White, another SAMS mission partner, has taken over as Paraguayan Coordinator of “Mission Paraguay”. We wondered at one point if we would be able to continue with the visit of the group to the Chaco as group leader Chris Hawksbee who has worked with the indigenous people there for many years had to return suddenly to England as his father was dying. However, with some juggling of projects and the presence of English coordinator David Orritt and that of Caroline, it did go ahead with no major problems.

The volunteers worked on a variety of projects including children’s clubs, sewing and knitting workshops, building and repairs on houses of very needy families, painting in a children’s home, starting to build 2 new churches and repairing water cisterns. Now comes the task of planning for next year and prioritising needs within the Diocese.

Family news

Alber and Jack started their new academic year in August as they follow the American system. Alber moved up to 3rd Grade and Jack moved up to 2nd Grade at the Asuncion Christian Academy. We were disappointed that Alber now has less than half the learning support time that he was getting last year but he really likes his new class teacher who seems understanding of his needs. Luli will continue at her Spanish-speaking preschool until December as we didn’t want to move her at this stage. We were all rather sickly over July and August with flu and tummy bugs but have fully recovered now, although the weather continues to swing between 35 degrees and 10 degrees which doesn’t help. We very much enjoyed a short visit from Murray’s sister and her husband and look forward to Penny’s god-daughter arriving soon. We will be going to Buenos Aires at the end of September for a week as we need to hand in paperwork relating to the children’s UK settlement visas. The forms are not easy and don’t seem to relate to our personal situation or the reality in Paraguay so we are a little anxious. However, a friend of ours has recently spent time with the Vice Consul and was able to explain our situation. She has agreed to support us.

We give thanks to God for answered prayers regarding:

- The very real possibility of change in Paraguay, especially for the poor
- The signing of Esperanza’s special agreement with the Ministry and the progress in each foster child’s situation
- A safe and fruitful time for the Mission Paraguay volunteers.
- The ability to hand over our responsibilities in Esperanza and Mission Paraguay.

We'd appreciate your ongoing prayers for:

- Stability for Paraguay as we enter this new phase in government and for President Lugo and his ministers.
- God's hand over the Esperanza children's future and wisdom and sensitivity for the new Director of the Adoption Centre. For the Esperanza finances following the devaluing of the pound.
- Pastor Agustin and Teresa Maidana as they take over supervision of Esperanza
- Peter and Sally Bartlett as they prepare for leadership of the Paraguayan Anglican diocese here.
- More Christian English teachers for the school.
- The Alpha course starting on September 11th.
- The follow up work on the Mission Paraguay projects begun this year, and planning for 2009.
- Our kids' settlement visas, and for health and energy as we finish here and look for God's guidance for life back in the UK from December onwards.

“He will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.”

Isaiah 26:3

This comes as always with our love and our thanks for your prayers and practical support.

Murray, Penny, Alber, Jack and Luli, SAMS mission partners working with the Anglican church in Asuncion, Paraguay.