

Link Letter No.10 April 2013

**Dear friends,**

Our trip back to England over the Christmas period was busy but good. We were able to spend time catching up with family, and we especially thank friends in Salisbury for their generosity in providing bases and transport. It was also good to hear from so many of you, and an added bonus for David was to arrive back in Juarez to find a pile of Christmas cards that had braved the uncertainties of the postal service! Shelley spent a good month post Christmas in Sicily with her father.



**David and Shelley Stokes**  
CMS mission partners  
**Argentina**

Former SAMS mission partners, the Stokes returned to the Diocese of Northern Argentina in November 2010 with CMS. They are accompanying the mainly Wichí speaking congregations at a time of rapid change. David is involved in encouraging and training new and existing church leaders. Shelley works mainly with the women, helping with the women's conferences and encouraging the start of parenting groups. They served with SAMS in Chile from 1988-1992 (where their children Jon and Sarah were born) and in Northern Argentina from 1993-1999.



*"Tangles" - a game to encourage teamwork*

**Lhatenekhi ready: Liturgia book next!**

One of Shelley's first tasks on arriving back was to help David proofread the final version of the Wichí *Lhatenekhi* (service and hymnbook) before sending it off to the Argentine Bible Society for printing. We hope the printing process and distribution can go ahead promptly. There is great demand for this new book – an important mark



*Celebrating Communion in Barrio Pilcomayo*

of Anglican identity here. One of David's tasks for this year is to start work on a revision of the *'Liturgia'* as it is called here. This is a book for church leaders containing other services and prayers as well as some teaching for baptism and confirmation candidates. This hasn't been revised for more than a generation, and really requires more radical change.

Pray for great wisdom and the right helpers for this process!

### **Ordination questions**

In February several leaders were ordained in Barrio Obrero, the large Wichí community in Juárez. The selection and training of new leaders is a big issue at present in the diocese. There are many requests (sometimes demands!) for ordinations coming from the different communities. At present the process should be as follows:

- The members of the local church, or church council, meet together to decide on the appropriate candidates
- The candidate is helped to discern whether God is calling them
- Then the person needs to undergo some training (at present a fortnight a year for usually five consecutive years)
- Finally CoPA (the Commission for Pastoral oversight of the Aboriginal churches) check that guidelines have been followed and that they agree.

Reaching consensus at the local church level is often difficult, and in recent times a number of people have been ordained with little or no training, leading to expectations of 'easy' ordinations now. The fact that there was fairly general agreement about the two leaders



*Men's group at the "Faith in the Family" conference*

in Barrio Obrero was very encouraging. There is a real need though for the indigenous churches to think through their understanding of ordination and what the culturally appropriate process should be. One of David's tasks this year is to accompany them with this.

### **Families under threat**

The bishop's wife, Catherine, has organised a number of "*Faith in the Family*" conferences for people to discuss the challenges families are facing, most recently in Barrio Obrero. This provided an opportunity for parents (and grandparents) to get together to think about their situation and what they can do to strengthen their family life. It is hard for us as outsiders to grasp the enormous changes and pressures Wichi families have been facing. These sometimes have had the effect of undermining their confidence as parents, particularly so with the fathers. Traditionally the father would teach his son how to fish and hunt and how to behave. But in an urban context, the father often has no job and needs to depend on government aid, while much of his son's education has been taken over by school and TV. Setting appropriate limits is a big challenge – especially in the new environment where the parents are often unsure of their bearings. The task for the church is to know how to encourage parents to take back appropriate responsibility and see how they can accompany their children in the face of bewildering change.

### **Events and news**

By the time you read this, we should have completed our first five-day trip to visit the churches in a particular zone, starting with Misión Chaqueña. This week we plan to start a pilot group in Juárez for the Abundant Life discipleship course recently published in Wichi. The invitations for the first training course for new leaders-in-training, scheduled for 14-26 May, are going out now.



*Women's group at the "Faith in the Family" conference*

We finish by noting the widespread and genuine delight the news of Pope Francis' appointment has caused here. The Anglican Bishop Greg Venables, based in Buenos Aires, says: *"He is much more of a Christian, Christ-centred and Spirit-filled, than a mere churchman. ... He is consistently humble and wise, outstandingly gifted yet a common man."*

### **Points for praise and prayer**

- Give thanks for a good trip to visit family over Christmas
- Give thanks 'Lhatenekhi' is now with the printers: please pray for the 'Liturgia' revision now!
- Pray for clear thinking about the selection and training of new leaders and for the training course in Juárez: 14-26 May.
- Pray for the women's conference in Pozo Yacaré (Alligator's well): 10-12 May.
- Pray for Wichí parents, especially fathers, to appreciate the importance of their role and increase in confidence in fulfilling it.

With our love,

*David and Shelley*

PS. Did you know that you can now receive link letters by email, sent as a pdf? If you would like to receive them this way and help CMS save money, please contact **the links team on [links@cms-uk.org](mailto:links@cms-uk.org)**

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