

A Very Happy Christmas from Tartagal

Ed and Marie Brice's latest News

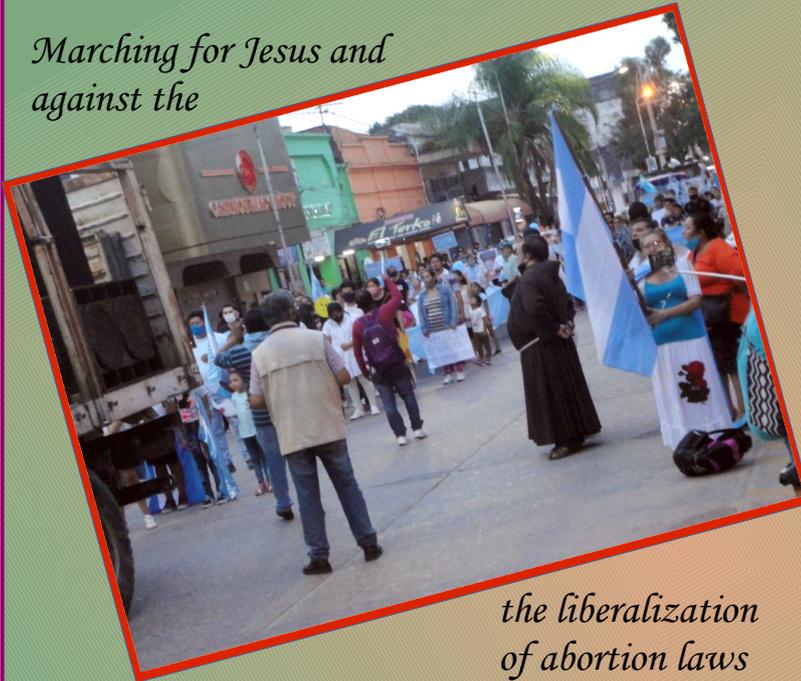
Monday 21/12/2020



Dear Friends,

Next Sunday we are planning on holding our first, in person, service and Holy Communion since the 16th March. The Wednesday before Christmas we are planning separate services in four different homes, rather like house groups, then meeting together virtually for a final meditation. While the pandemic roars on in other parts of the country, with a total of over one and a half million people infected this year, the numbers of new cases here in the north has dropped, to just ten this month. Life is tentatively, in our case, returning to a kind of normal.

*Marching for Jesus and
against the*



*the liberalization
of abortion laws*

At the end of November the local evangelical churches got permission to hold the annual March for Jesus. They had to take all the necessary precautions, face masks etc. The date coincided with a national event to demonstrate against planned liberalization of the abortion laws. So the decision was made to combine the events and invite others to participate. We are very grateful to God that a number Roman Catholic pro-life groups joined us. I think is probably the first time this has happened here.

Ten days ago we made our first trip out of town in nine months. We were invited to the pastors conference of the Assemblies of God in the northern frontier town of Sta. Victoria on the Pilcomayo river. It was great to get out in spite of the soaring temperatures. The church building we met in made social distancing fairly easy, not that people there seemed particularly bothered. I think we were the only ones to use face masks! We ate together outside and were privileged to have the only bedroom with airconditioning for the two nights we spent there.

Marie was able to visit and restore a friendship of some years ago.

In our last letter we told you about the false start to the Matthew study in the Wichi community of Lapacho 2. We had another go at the beginning of December, so far, we have met three times with full attendance. Four sessions remain to finish the book, but are taking a week off for Christmas then plan to carry on till we finish.

Another area which has begun to get back to normal has been the frontier with Bolivia. This was officially re-opened last week. That means we are planning to make a trip to use the ATMs in the Bolivian frontier town of Yacuiba. In the past this method has provided us with a much better exchange rate than using the Tartagal ones which are heavily taxed. But we don't however know how the exchange houses have weathered the long closure. It will be something of a fact finding mission.

Fernanda, who is studying nursing, has just successfully finished some exams and is delighted also to have got a job in one of the local supermarkets, her boy friend Maxi is coming to the end of his final year studies. He had no news from the university about there plans for final exams or graduation right until the last minute. He now finds himself in the middle of unexpected final exams but, as in many parts of the world job prospects are very poor even should he graduate. Darío, the other university student in our congregation is continuing his law degree in a private university and hopes that next year he might be able to qualify to do clerical work for a firm of lawyers while he continues his studies. Please from for our students and for Darío as he continues to keep contact with some of the adolescents in an informal way. They too have been worn out by “home schooling” and dependance on often very poor Internet connections. There is still much uncertainty about schooling next year.

Breakfast in Santa Victoria



We are still hoping that we will be able to hold a confirmation service before too long to receive new members. Maxi and Fernanda are well on the way in their preparations and we hope that two adolescents: Josué and Fernanda will also be able to join them. There are also two young mothers who are preparing. Karina, used to come to church, on and off, with her mum Doña Trini but it wasn't until her mum's death this year that she decided to sort out her relationship with God. She shares the family home with her two sisters (single mums with one adolescent son each) and her own two children and the environment can be quite hostile. Please pray for Victor and Claudia as they accompany her in her walk of faith. Claudia also accompanies Adriana the other mum and candidate for confirmation. We would also value your prayers for Mabel, who has recently started attending our virtual services and Marie has been visiting.

You will not be surprised to hear that our plan to visit Neill and Javier and their families in Paraguay at least twice a year did not happen. Neither are there any signs as to when we might be able to go. Our bishop and his wife, Nick and Catherine, are still stranded in the UK and our colleagues David and Shelly Stokes who are planning to return to the UK early next year are not able to leave the province they live in (Formosa) because of its very strict quarantine rules.

Advent has been very special for us this year as Marie receives the regular mid-day meditations and prayers in the AMARE (Mother's Union) Whatsapp group which have been a real blessing for us.

What ever your circumstances this Christmas our prayer is that you may rejoice again in the birth of Christ the Lord, good news of great joy.

With all our love

Ed and Marie

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