

Ed and Marie Brice's News from Tartagal Friday 28/08/2020



Dear Friends,

We began our last letter with the story of a Whatsapp message. I don't promise to make this a regular feature, but it seems that this is increasingly the way we get most of our local information.

It was eleven o'clock on a Saturday night, two weeks ago, we were within seconds of turning out the light, when a message arrived. Curiosity got the better of us, but only after an hour did the light eventually get turned off. Marie opened the message: "Good evening María, how are you. I am Silvia, do you remember me?"

This was someone Marie hadn't had any contact with for over two years. Silvia was one of those people that Marie had visited quite regularly in 2017 sharing the gospel, reading the Bible and praying with her. It was Viviana who put them in contact because Silvia was struggling in her marriage. Silvia had come to faith but without the support of her traditional Roman Catholic husband, eventually, slipped off the radar. Silvia continued messaging: "I want you to know that your prayers for us haven't been in vain, God came into my family and yesterday I remembered you...God used you so that I could know his word. Thank you María. I was just talking about it with my husband and he said: 'Write to her.'" The messages went backwards and forwards. "Two months ago we were about to get a divorce. Then, one evening some friends of ours came to see us and told us what had happened to them. My husband, for the first time, gave in and listened to them...he accepted their invitation and gave his life to Jesus. That's how it all began. Every day we read the Bible together, the only music you hear in our house is worship songs. He has begun to look at me in a different way and demonstrate his love for me...I think we have talked to each other more in the last two months than all of the rest of our ten years of marriage..."

When in the UK, last year, we visited our support churches and shared, among other things, the frustration of seeing people come to faith only for them to apparently lose interest. Of course Jesus spoke about this in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:1ff), we were also reminded that eight years (the time we have been in Tartagal) when compared to a life time (may be ten times that) is a very short time scale and took some comfort from that. Just because we lose contact doesn't mean that God will discontinue his work in people's lives. Now we have a concrete example of that truth, to share with you.

At the beginning of June there was a relaxation of restrictions for Tartagal and other parts of the country that had not seen any cases of Covid-19. Towards the end of the month, however, a local doctor (who had been in Bolivia) tested positive. At about the same time there were a couple of cases in neighbouring towns, so some restrictions were reimposed. These were relaxed again during July as there were no further cases. By the end of the month all shops could open as long as there was still social distancing and the use of face masks and hand sanitizer etc. We held a couple of meetings of our

church leadership team using our well ventilated car-port. Churches, at this time, were still limited to meetings of 10, social distanced people, so we resolved to stay virtual. However Ed thought it was time to restart the Matthew study in the Wichi community of Lapacho 2. All told the study only involved eight, people and they usually met outside. Social distancing was evident there even before covid-19.



The first meeting after the break was at the end of July. But it began to drizzle! Fortunately the well ventilated church provided an adequate alternative. The following week they did meet outside and, apart from a family group (bubble?) of observers, they managed to follow most of the protocols. Unbeknown to them, as they met, Tartagal was beginning to experience the first cases of a large outbreak which has now resulted in over 600 people testing positive for the disease. From the beginning of August we have been back to phase one of lock down. Marcelino is a member of the Matthew's gospel studying group and a health worker, he lives in Lapacho 2. He has told us that four Wichi from communities in and near Tartagal have died from the virus (that is out of a total of 29 deaths since the first case reported back in June). He also says that many people in the communities have fever but they won't go to the hospital. We have also heard that a number of the Wichi communities (like Misión La Paz) on the river Pilcomayo have also recorded cases. Please pray that these people will receive suitable health care and be able to take the necessary preventive measures.

The meetings of adolescents that used to take place in the Pinto's (Zacarías and Viviana) household have been on hold all this month. But Lara, Fernanda and Josué were able to finish the Abundant Life course and have also completed the final exam with flying colours. But keeping contact with these young people, now, is proving a challenge which Darío and Maxí continue to struggle with. Pray for the work of God's Holy Spirit in these lives.



Sunday services, Bible studies, prayer meetings and the men's discipleship group all continue on-line and keep us in contact with each other. Last Sunday however our 'congregation' was expanded with participants from different parts of Northern Argentina and even from the UK. This was a special service to receive four of the women from the Good Shepherd church (Fernanda, Claudia, Viviana and Marie) as members of AMARE which is better known in the rest of the world as Mother's Union. This organization is proving very helpful for Christian women here to receive mutual support in prayer and other practical ways, releasing them in the different areas they find themselves serving God.



Once again thank you for sharing with us through your prayers

With all our love

Ed and Marie

Address: Calle Colon 650 Tartagal 4560 Salta
Argentina. Email: Ed.g.brice@gmail.com