

David and Shelley Stokes

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The call in action

Dear friends,

We started writing this letter in a quick turnaround back in Juarez between most of a fortnight spent with our children travelling in Argentina and an AMARE conference in Santa Teresa which starts tomorrow.

Family time

Families are very important here both for the Wichí and the Argentines generally – though they normally think in terms of extended family. We were delighted to see our son Jonathan for a “surprise” trip his wife AJ (Anna-Joy) had arranged for his 30th birthday, along with our daughter Sarah. After a trip taking in some spectacular mountain scenery and salt flats in the north east part of the country, we spent several days in Misión Chaqueña where we lived for seven years in the 1990s. Jonathan and Sarah were able to meet up with old schoolfriends – which meant much to both sides.

This original mission station, founded in 1914, has now become a large community; please pray for the community leaders as they struggle to work out how to relate with the wider Argentine world, and for the church leaders as they wrestle with the arrival of different denominations that have split the church.

Developments in AMARE

We got home yesterday after the AMARE conference in Santa Teresa. Over 90 women from 15 churches in the area gathered for Bible teaching, prayer and fellowship. Dry weather and dry roads made travel much easier for all and, as usual, the men cooked so that the women could participate. They were led by a very competent and dedicated young man with the unlikely name of Jezabel!

Among other things, we talked about the planned changes in AMARE. Instead of depending so much on the centre in Juarez, we are encouraging each zone to form a team and work together, with the stronger churches visiting and helping the less developed ones. Instead of an executive committee, there will be a small administration team, and once a year they will meet with representatives of the zonal teams. On 17-19 August we will have our second general assembly. To the great relief of all of us, the changes mean that there will not be elections which tend to follow political models and be very divisive. Shelley is working on amendments to our constitution, which we hope will be approved, and there will be other business matters and workshops. The planning and hosting will be a challenge, as we now have over 1,300 members. Four hundred came three years ago when we were far fewer, and there is only room for 150 comfortably at the venue. Give thanks for the growth of AMARE, and please pray for appropriate changes and for the general assembly.

Annual training courses in Juarez and La Paz for new church leaders

One of the determining factors this year was the unusually wet



Name: David and Shelley Stokes

Location: Ingeniero Juárez, Argentina

Our call: To serve Christ by accompanying the mainly Wichí-speaking congregations at a time of massive transition.

Our role: David visits and encourages church leaders and helps develop sustainable training while Shelley works with Wichí women, encouraging them to love the Lord and their neighbours.



Our family reunited together again

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weather in May. This meant the journeys to collect students from Potrillo (“foal”) to the North of Juárez and later on from Pozo Yacaré (“well of the alligator”) became epic struggles! Very few from south of the Bermejo River were able to attend this year at all and even navigating roads within Juárez to provide for the cooks was challenging for Shelley! In the end, 45 students did participate, many for the third successive year.

It was encouraging to have a number of new teachers involved this year, including several from the urban churches as well as an experienced Wichi pastor at present based in Misión Chaqueña. Bishop Mateo’s input on the church as the “body of Christ” was well received and David took the opportunity to trial the new Pastoral Manual that Bishop Nick Drayson has produced, which covers the essentials of the work of the local church and its leaders. Most of the students are already active in leading in their local churches. Please pray for them as they digest what they learnt and work out how to apply it appropriately for their own contexts.

Rain delays for the work in Chaco Province

We mentioned last time some of the efforts being made to strengthen the churches in Chaco province, south of the Bermejo River, which are quite remote from Juárez and difficult to reach. The discipleship course Abundant Life has moved ahead slowly and several more visits are needed to complete the course. The intention is that local tutors will then run courses. The Argentine Bible Society is moving forward with a project to produce an adaptation of the present Wichi Bible for the dialect used mainly south of the Bermejo River. A planned training course for potential translators had to be postponed because of impassable roads. Please pray for the successful completion of the discipleship course and the successful starting of the translation project.

The wider context

This is election year! There are local elections in June, and then national elections in October. In practice this means there are posters all over Juárez and loud music coming from the offices of the competing candidates on the main avenue. The national elections have a considerable impact on the wellbeing of the local communities – with rival politicians making promises and effectively sowing discord. The decision before the country for president does concern many – the stricter fiscal policies of the present President Macri have seen inflation reach 50 per cent, while the Peronist opposition which includes the previous President Cristina may make a comeback (charges of corruption are dismissed by supporters as being politically motivated). Pray for the country at this time of great confusion and turmoil!

Thank you for your ongoing prayer and support, which are crucial to the work here!

With our love,

David and Shelley

Photos from top to bottom: Groupwork at the AMARE conference; teaching on relationships; seemingly impassable roads; testing Shelley’s driving skills!



GOING FURTHER WITH CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

Have you booked your place at the CMS Adelante conference, a mission gathering to celebrate and learn more about all that God is doing in Latin America? Taking place from 20–21 September in Oxford, go to churchmissionsociety.org/adelante for more information and to book.

If you would like to discuss your mailings with us or to receive this link letter on a regular basis, please email supporter.care@churchmissionsociety.org or call 01865 787400

You can give to David and Shelley at: churchmissionsociety.org/stokes

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