

David and Shelley Stokes

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The call in action

Dear friends,

One of the many things we have seen in the Wichi is their ability to live in the present. It isn't that they don't think about the future, it is rather that their approach to it is much more flexible than in our culture. They are able to adapt to circumstances and situations as they develop. They aren't particularly surprised or concerned if plans have to be completely changed. This approach has had its advantages in responding to the present situation. Despite our years living here, we are still by contrast more inflexible and have to work harder at adapting to changing circumstances!

Situation update

Last time we wrote, Argentina had weathered the pandemic relatively well. Since then the country has been badly hit, starting with the capital and spreading out to all provinces. The number of COVID-19 deaths is now over 30,000. Of the three provinces where there are indigenous Anglican churches, Chaco and Salta now have significant numbers of cases. Most have been in the cities, but there have been some cases and deaths in Wichi communities. It is very difficult to get accurate information, and rumours abound. Amazingly, Formosa province where we live has only seen 160 cases so far – thanks to ongoing tight restrictions on movement.

AMARE

Our women's group, AMARE, continues to grow in various ways. There is a big WhatsApp group that includes AMARE members from the urban and indigenous churches in this diocese and members in Buenos Aires and Uruguay. It is centred on the Mothers' Union midday Wave of Prayer. Many indigenous members don't have access to WhatsApp, so some AMARE leaders in Potrillo now use the local radio to broadcast the Wave of Prayer audios and other encouraging Christian content.

One participant in the WhatsApp group is Vivi, a Christian doctor in Buenos Aires who became a member of AMARE on a visit here in 2015. She has been leading a 180-bed facility for COVID-19 patients who don't need intensive care. For over seven months now she has not left the facility or seen her husband and children. Neither she nor anyone else on the staff has contracted COVID-19, something Vivi sees as a miracle in response to the prayers of many of us.

In August we prepared and received four new members of AMARE in Tartagal via Google Meet, with input from people in Salta, Juarez and Guernsey. In spite of some problems and the limitations of working virtually, it was a very moving occasion!

News from Bishops Mateo and Crisanto

Last month we saw both Mateo and Crisanto and recorded short videos in our front hall for the CMS virtual Adelante conference in September. Working on translations was difficult! Crisanto gave thanks for the work of the early missionaries. Mateo reflected on the



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.



Outside our butcher's shop

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way Jesus' warnings about difficulties in the last days had prepared him and his people for the present pandemic. The link for Mateo's video is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opfVkB1rdSI&list=PLbGl5mtj7g1GsoCWllkEnVAC1S1B3cRX2&index=7>. These are very challenging times for both bishops, with very limited opportunities for travel, and an increasing number of church members fed up with the ongoing restrictions on normal church services!

The end of an era

Last time we told you of the deaths of three church leaders in Juarez. On 23 July Toribio Frias, the leader of the big Wichi church in Barrio Obrero (in Juarez), died very unexpectedly of a heart attack. He was a true man of peace, and we miss him. Today, 30 October, Isidro Vilte went to be with the Lord. He was one of the main translators of the Wichi Bible, a grand old man and an influential church leader, well known to all who have worked here. The older generation are given much respect, as are missionaries past and present. Deaths and departures bring grief, but they are part of the Lord's plan: as he calls that generation to be with himself and the missionary era draws to a close, this will allow space for younger Wichi and Toba leaders to find the way forward.

Grain of wheat

Our expectations for our final year here have been turned upside down by events. None of the training courses programmed for the year will now take place. It is still not clear whether it will be possible to visit communities in person to say our goodbyes before we leave, possibly in late January or early February 2021. David has had to let go of the handing over of responsibilities he had hoped for. The passage that has often come to mind is John 12:24: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." It may well be that the present pattern of selection and training of new leaders needs to fall to the ground, so that a new pattern, more attuned to Wichi and Toba cultural understandings, can come to birth. We need much wisdom to know how to give our backing to those who will take the lead in this renewal process.

With our love and thanks to you all,

David and Shelley

Points for thanks and prayer

- Give thanks for Vivi and her team, and pray they will continue to stay safe while looking after COVID-19 patients in Buenos Aires. Pray for the authorities in dealing with the pandemic.
- Give thanks for the courage Mateo and Crisanto have shown during these challenging months.
- Pray for the Lord to bring about new patterns of selection and training of leaders for the indigenous churches here.
- Pray for the opportunities to say goodbyes and end our time here well.



Photos from top to bottom: Bottle tree after pruning; virtual member making; Isidro Vilte, October 2020; the end of an era

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Are you pondering a call to cross-cultural mission? We'd love to connect and help you discern what God might be saying. Find out more about how we can help you to step into God's mission at churchmissionsociety.org/explore

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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