

MCDONOUGH NEWSLETTER JULY/AUGUST 2014

As we sit down to write this newsletter, we cannot help but feel like real rural missionaries. Not because we haven't been before today, but Rachel is currently getting over a delightful case of giardia (google it), we have been repeatedly bitten to pieces by the bugs and had our first communal bath time in the local river. Plus we finally finished putting the tables and chairs together, after John had taken away all the table tops which didn't fit and cut them up in a friend's workshop. It was a hard days work, but the end product was so satisfying to see. We still could not believe that the frames had been donated over 4 years ago and no one had returned to give them the needed bolts and screws or even bothered to check if all the sets fitted.

Then John has gotten to know a man who married into the community and used to attend a church in his old town 8 years ago. He was so excited to tell us that he could play the keyboard and knew some hymns from back then that he arranged to come and meet us one night at the school to show us what he knew, with his battery powered instrument in tow. On the night he turned up with his wife and kids, his neighbour and our friend Richard had told a lady who had been asking questions about faith also showed up with her teenage daughter and friends. We then began to work out some songs we knew in Guarani that he could play, as most of the ones he remembered were in Spanish and we had a sing-a-long session. It was truly odd the way this body of people had suddenly come together and even though it was more of a show, it gave us a glimpse of the potential to begin meeting together to share our faith with them. Sadly, it also made us painfully aware of how much more language learning we will need to do in order to communicate clearly, as many of the adults speak a far more traditional version of Guarani than we are used to, mixed with a different dialect of Guarani altogether. But we know we will get there in the end!

After a very cold July we were relieved to have a milder and much dryer August, allowing the farmer who rents some land off the community to fix the bridge (whilst sadly deforesting some of the area) and we can now get in and out again without any problems. With greater ease of access we have been doing clinic runs on a weekly basis again, including many trips to a hospital as one of the ladies had recently given birth and her and her new born were extremely ill. Knowing how easily a simple infection can have devastating effects like Gregoria's Aunt if left untreated, it was a relief to be able to facilitate this lady's care. Even though it meant a lot more travelling on a day to day basis, seeing her recover and building useful contacts with the medical staff made it all worth while and best of all, thanks to this shared experience we now have a good relationship with this family, who we hope will dispel any confusion over why we are there and what we are like as people.

It can be very difficult breaking into a community that don't know why you would want to be there, especially as we haven't tried to take any land from them (which they kept expecting to happen in the beginning). After being given a very generous gift from a Pastor, we decided not only could we bless the people with a practical gift by donating blankets, but we could use this as an opportunity to visit every house in the community and introduce ourselves to the people so that at the very least they would know our names.

You can read some more about this at www.elimmissions.co.uk in the Paraguay section, but since visiting everyone, we now get waved at on the roads as we pass by and when we offer lifts to people, they are not afraid to get in our car with us (as in the beginning even the kids didn't want to ride in the truck). We hope to build on this foundation and begin revisiting these homes to drink tereré and practise some Guarani with the families, whilst removing more of the mystery that surrounds us.

Finally we have had the chance to party in the community, with an invite to a birthday party at the school and then celebrating 'day of the child' in the community. We taught them a game crossed between hot potato and pass the parcel (as we had no wrapping paper to give the prizes out in), heard the national anthem sung by the children in Guarani and Spanish and were used as professional photographers for all the events, mainly as we are the only ones with a camera. What was funny was seeing some of the young adults in the community trying to get a knitted doll off us, as they thought they were so wonderful. We had to explain there were only enough for the children and then watched as they tried to laugh it off as a joke. Maybe next time we'll have to have a celebration for those who are just young at heart.

Thank you all once again for your support, kind emails with wonderful words of encouragement and most of all your prayers. When so much is going on, it is easy for us to get tired, ill and to feel overwhelmed by all there is to be done. But sharing our news with you reminds us of the progress we are making, slowly but surely and gives us the chance to reflect on some things to be thankful for. We cannot thank you all enough for facilitating our work out here in Paraguay!

God Bless,
Rachel and John