



Dear Friends,

As this year wearily drags itself towards the finishing line, it is high time we updated you on our work and family life. It has been and continues to be a very strange time in our lives. One of the strangest things has been that whoever we are in contact with around the world, we are all facing the same pandemic threat. It reminds us how small, interconnected, and fragile our lives and this world is. Andrew elaborated on this interconnectivity and other environmental and work related matters matters in a recent interview with the [Church Times](#).

COVID-19

Thankfully, we are all well, as is family back in the UK. Many of our close friends in Salta were infected, and a couple of them lost loved ones. We remain healthy and were very fortunate in that we were able to gather the family at home just before lockdown, which made the whole experience a lot easier than it might otherwise have been. Andrew had a knee operation just prior to clinics stopping elective surgery, as consulting and bed spaces were given over to COVID cases.

It has been a wild ride. We went from being an exemplary lockdown country, to being ranked among the worst 10 countries globally. Case numbers only started dropping towards the end of October (and that is just the first wave). Salta, with a population of approximately 1.3 million people has officially registered just over 21.000 cases. The tally of the dead and those recovering is a permanent fixture in the local papers.

Deforestation loopholes



Lockdown has meant public hearings for deforestation permits ground to halt for a few months. However, Salta's government has now introduced the practice of virtual hearings but has used the opportunity to both restrict attendance and access to the information needed to challenge proposals. The worse measure though has been a decision to exempt some proposals from having a public hearing at all. This would make it a lot harder for the public to be aware and question future deforestation, something we have denounced in the local press.

While our actions are restricted in terms of attending meetings and travel, we are seeking other ways of influencing this negative turn in government policy. We are, for example, seeking to support a legal challenge which has been initiated by a group of concerned people here in Salta.

This is in stark contrast to [calls](#) being made for G20 countries (of which Argentina is a member) for zero deforestation, as a starting point to prevent further losses of critical natural resources, alongside proforestation and restoration efforts. The national government is demonstrating some interest in moving towards stopping deforestation. We have seen proposed changes to legislation that would favour conservation, but there is obviously significant resistance to this from the farming sector.

Environmental workshops

Proposed creation care training for Churches in and around Tartagal have also been postponed. We had hoped to do some web-based training, but this has not yet been possible. The person we are working with on this initiative, Viviana, has had a very busy year, and has had to deal with several health-related issues in her family. We aim to undertake these initiatives in 2021.

La Caldera

Plans for a second phase of refurbishment of the diocesan retreat house in La Caldera continues to be on hold (because of the pandemic). While there is still substantial repair and further construction work to be done on the old farmhouse, the refurbished kitchen, new dormitories, and re-roofed bungalow do mean that the site can be used again for group activities as when restrictions are lifted.



Family

Maria has passed the halfway mark with her Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (run by the John Ray Initiative and A Rocha UK). She is enjoying the course, and much of her learning is serving to shape and strengthen our approach to environmental matters. Tomas (Aero Engineer) is back at work in Cordoba, where he has rented a flat. Cecilia (Lawyer) has been admitted to the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid to undertake a master's in human rights (Starting Feb 2021). She is also doing a 4-month internship with the Washington DC-based ombudsman's Office at the Organization of American States (OAS). Due to COVID, the internship is done virtually. Carolina (future Vet) has now completed her university classes and coursework and is now sitting her remaining final exams. As some travel restrictions are eased for Christmas, she and Andrew will venture out and drive down to Cordoba this month to bring her belongings back.

Compassion International

Travel restrictions over the past months have meant Andrew has been restricted to desk work and web-based meetings. This has not stopped workflow, and indeed it would seem that we have been busier than ever, certainly more meetings, albeit virtual. His current work with Compassion is focussed on how the organisation can best respond to the environmental challenges posed by climate change. In October he led a presentation of this issue to the organisation's Board, and is now helping in the design and implementation of an organisational response to this global challenge.

Prayer Pointers

Please pray for the following points:

- Give thanks for our health and safety. Pray for Andrew and Carolina as they drive to Cordoba later this month and bring back her stuff (including her brother).
- Pray for guidance and wisdom for Andrew as he helps shape Compassion's position and response to the issue of climate change and its effects on children in poverty.
- Pray for Argentina, where poverty is increasing dramatically because of a significant recession. Political and economic instability never seems to be far below the surface.

Please do email us if you want further detailed news; it is always good to hear from you!

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