

Land for Life Fundación Refugio

Circular No. 52 August 2021

Dear friends,

We start with an apology for the lapse in communications. Although the pandemic has restricted much of our “normal” activity, there always still seems to be a lot going on, much of which gets in the way of sitting down and writing! We are doing well, although travel restrictions continue to impede any trips abroad. Argentina currently allows entry to only 600 arriving passengers per day, which has caused havoc for international airline schedules, indeed, several international companies have decided to stop services all together.

Francisco Perez

We were deeply saddened by the death of indigenous land rights campaigner, Francisco Perez. He has been instrumental in helping both his people along the Pilcomayo, and indigenous communities across the Chaco, to get their rights to land recognized. He has played a key role in promoting the wichi language and its grammar. Francisco died after a lengthy battle with COVID. His wise and tactful leadership will be greatly missed.



His daughter, Cristina, has been elected by community leaders as his successor. She has an enormous challenge on her hands as she now guides indigenous communities in pushing the government to fully implement the Inter American Court of Human Right’s ruling on legalizing their historic rights to land and restoring the ecological integrity of their forests.



Vaccination challenges

Francisco had been vaccinated but caught the virus shortly afterwards. Many indigenous peoples are, however, reluctant to be vaccinated. Despite the efforts of health workers, in some areas, vaccination rates have only reached 30%. This is the result of a combination of beliefs and fake news, including the idea that COVID is a white person’s disease. Some forest communities believe that due to their relative isolation they will not be affected by the virus. Some leaders, including church pastors, have urged people not to get the vaccine. Our Bishop (still stranded in the UK!) has been working with health officials to try and convey correct information and encourage people to get inoculated.



Fundación Refugio

Fundación Refugio (Land for Life) was invited by the government to participate in a review of Salta’s land-use map, which is critical to controlling deforestation. Andrew’s colleagues Marcelo and Enrique attended the online event. The map was due for revision back in 2014, but the government has dragged its feet. The meeting appears to have been more political window dressing, allowing the government to say it is doing something. We shall keep close tabs on the process! We are pleased to say we have recently got all the charity’s paperwork up to date, which is no mean feat in Argentina’s heavy bureaucracy.

Family



In March, Maria, Andrew, and Carolina drove to the beach (a 2-day drive!), south of Buenos Aires. Although on the tail end of summer, the weather was kind to them, though not quite warm enough for swimming.

Cecilia is now in Madrid, completing a masters in in constitutional law and human rights. As we write these lines she is preparing to move to Valencia, where she will spend the remainder of her time, completing placements online. She is also doing consultancy work for the Organization of American States.

Tomas is now assistant manager in the aero engineering consulting firm he has been working for over the past couple of years but is looking for new opportunities abroad in renewable energy.



Carolina is now three exams away from becoming a vet and is doing these exams on-line from home. She continues to do some practice work at a vet clinic in Salta and keeps a close eye on our six dogs. She also got some practice with injections on Andrew, who experienced some painful sciatica, which eventually led to him having spinal surgery for a herniated disc! Happy to report he is now well on his way to full recovery.

A new season

As our children transition into their adult lives, we sense it is the right season for us to review the direction of our ministry. After 22 years of service with SAMS/CMS we are keen to share the experience and connections we have developed around creation care ministry with the wider global church. It is for this reason that Andrew has accepted a full-time appointment to create and lead an Environmental Stewardship and Creation Care team, responsible for embedding environmental stewardship and climate change adaptation into Compassion International's global program.

As part of this change, we will become CMS mission associates (at the end of August), which will allow us to retain a formal link with CMS, while giving Andrew the possibility of engaging full-time with Compassion. This arrangement allows us to continue with our employment and pension arrangements in the UK. As part of the transition CMS will be hosting an online farewell event in September and we will confirm the date as soon as we get news. You are all most welcome to attend the event, which will be run on Zoom.

Our Land for Life work will continue through Fundación Refugio, a registered charity we created some years ago. We will continue to serve on the charity's board for the foreseeable future. This arrangement will allow us to engage others in furthering the work we will continue to do in relation to creation care, especially curbing deforestation. We would value your continued prayers for this ministry, especially as we also consider focusing more on climate change and its effects on indigenous communities in the Chaco. We will of course continue to update you via our L4L circulars.

Prayer pointers

- Pray for Cristina Perez as she takes on the challenging role of leading over 50 indigenous communities in their ongoing negotiations with the government over their land rights. Also, for the ASOCIANA team which provides vital technical support in this process.
- Give thanks for Andrew's recovery from spinal surgery and for the good health of the family. Pray that we will all be able to get our second vaccines, especially as Russia has as yet not been able to fully deliver on its second jab.
- Pray for Andrew's transition into the new full-time role with Compassion International.

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

Andrew and Maria Leake

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