

CUMBRIA ARGENTINA METHODIST PARTNERSHIP

REPORT FOR SYNOD – APRIL 2021

PARTNERSHIP IN A PANDEMIC

It is over 20 years since the seeds of our Partnership with the Methodist Church in Argentina (IEMA) were sown. This was at the millennium, when Methodist Bishop Aldo visited Cumbria, but it really took off in 2005 when 5 representatives from Cumbria visited Patagonia. Exchange visits both ways by church leaders, members and young people since have cemented these ties.

The planned programme for 2020 included a visit by our District Chair, which it was hoped would include development of a link with the Methodist University in Rosario. Cumbria was looking forward to a visit by Nora Viacava and Natalia Ochoa from IEMA – both being involved in a programme of development of lay leaders. Nora heads up FeMMA (equivalent of Methodist Women in Britain) and was to lead the Cumbria MWiB Residential Conference planned for last November. Both exchanges had to be postponed but close contact by e-mail, Facebook etc has continued.

A link between Langwathby village school in Eden and a Methodist primary school in Rosario was launched but was put on hold while schools were closed. One of the teachers from Rosario (Geri de Paris) visited the school while visiting Cumbria with her family in 2018 and keeps in touch. Now schools are back, it is hoped the link will flourish.

Covid 19 has hit South America hard. IEMA recognised need across Argentina and with the help of volunteers from their churches set up a programme to provide relief to families in the churches and in the community. However, in July we received an urgent request from Bishop Americo to say that funds were running out and could we help? Whilst we have never wanted the Partnership to be about sending money, we also recognise the inequality of resources and have supported some projects financially such as IEMA's student homes and children's homes.

Consequently we launched an appeal to our churches in Cumbria, which produced an immediate and generous response. Altogether we have been able to send over £7,000 for Covid relief. Bishop Americo wrote: "Our gratitude is immense for the generosity of your help with the families that IEMA is assisting. The money you have sent has benefited very many families who give thanks with joy and gratitude".

The far-flung nature of the Methodist churches in Argentina has led them to make much use of modern technology. Consequently they were well-placed to stream services during lockdown, make videos and generally keep in touch with each other and with us.

A minister in the Patagonia District invited us to contribute a reading and prayer to a "devocional" (a short service on video) seen by church members in that part of the country. The Bishop also invited us to make a short video, giving thanks for the Partnership, which was circulated to all churches for inclusion in worship. Friends in Bariloche (Patagonia) sent us a message of appreciation of the Partnership together with pictures of their visit to Cumbria in 2015. Our District Chair made a video with a Christmas message to the churches, which was much appreciated.

For the future, we look forward to reinstating the exchange visits postponed from this year and developing the school and university links. We have much to learn from each other and, whilst the use of modern technology is a great way to maintain ongoing contact, we have found that exchange visits and "making friends" have been invaluable in developing and deepening the links between our two churches.

Having said that, many of us have become accustomed to Zoom during the lockdown! Love it or hate it, Zoom may be a way of sharing with friends in Argentina. If any churches would like to pursue the possibility of a Zoom link with a church in Argentina, please let us know and we will see what we can do!

Irene McKay (Convenor)

Ray Wager (Treasurer)