

Spring 2002

Latinfile

Latin mission today

Latin Link  Enlace Latino

Partners in Christian Mission



Signs of the times

the story in pictures page 4-5



New Step supplement

with this issue



ARGENTINA IN NEED OF A MIRACLE

Mission in a time of crisis – 8-page special

Mission in a



Three turbulent decades

1970s

1974 Death of Juan Perón, husband of 'Evita' (d. 1952) during his third presidential term. His widow Isabel takes over – ousted by a military coup in 1976.

1976 Start of the 'Dirty War' when 30,000 people 'disappeared'.

1980s

1982 Rampant inflation: General Galtieri invades the Malvinas in an effort to gain popular support. Margaret Thatcher sends the Task Force to win back the Falklands for Britain.

1983 Military government falls.

1989 *Peronista* and multi-millionaire Carlos Menem elected president.

1990s

1990 UK diplomatic relations restored.

1991 New currency the *peso* introduced, pegged to the US\$.

1998 Start of recession.

1999 Fernando de la Rúa elected president.

December 2001

Following \$1.3 billion run on banks, government freezes savings accounts... restricts public sector salaries... cuts pensions by 13 per cent... the IMF refuses to lend Argentina \$1.24 billion for its December debt repayment... de la Rúa declares state of emergency...

20/21 'La Noche de las Cacerolas' – the middle classes take to the streets of Buenos Aires in protest, banging pots and pans outside the presidential palace and Congress... supermarkets looted, banks smashed, 27 killed in riots... Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo resigns... President leaves the Casa Rosada by helicopter...

In the following weeks... three presidents come and go... Eduardo Duhalde takes office... *peso* devalued by 29 per cent... Argentina defaults on payment of foreign debt of US\$141 billion...

The people of Argentina are paying a painful price for their country's economic collapse.

In mid-March the Bible institutes in Buenos Aires open their doors for a new academic year. But will they have any students?

Training for mission can be a precarious business at the best of times. Most students pay their own fees, working during the day and attending classes in the evening, taking their courses a term at a time. But now they're under real pressure.

The economic crisis in Argentina is hitting students as it is hitting millions of others, particularly those in the middle classes.

'People are falling into poverty – thousands every day – who have never known such a situation before,' explains lecturer Paul Davies. He should be teaching a course on the theology of mission this term; his wife, Wilma, one on mission in a different culture. Paul and Wilma went to Argentina with Latin Link to support the development of Argentina's mission movement and to train Argentinian Christians for mission.

Many people they know personally are suffering terribly. Like Mauricio, a church



Wilma Davies with students

leader in the suburb of Los Olivos, once a partner in a confectionery wholesalers, supplying small shops. Now the shops have gone out of business, he is reduced to selling sweets on the buses. Or Julio, who suffered a heart attack and has been off work, without pay, for a year. He should be taking five kinds of medicine, but is only taking two. He has no money to buy the medication he needs and the family has already sold their fridge. Someone suggested he went to the free hospital in Tigre – but they had no drugs left. Only a miracle can save Julio. Only a miracle can save Argentina.



Queuing for three hours outside a bank is normal these days

No surprise

'One wonders whether the only ones who did not realise what was coming were the politicians,' reflects well-respected Argentinian theologian, René Padilla. 'Everyone realised we couldn't go on like this, with thousands being laid off, national companies going out of business and the country being taken over by international corporations. And there's the whole question of corruption – from the bottom to the top the whole country has been functioning on the basis of corruption.'

'It's not that finance is our priority, but finance touches everything.'

Towards the end of last year millions of dollars mysteriously left the country – US\$1.3 billion withdrawn from the banks just the day before the government severely restricted withdrawals on bank accounts. They will be frozen, they say, until 2004/5. Meanwhile, ordinary people simply cannot access their savings.

Good news

At times like these it's encouraging to hear a good news story. Héctor and Sandra Moreno, students of Paul and Wilma, finally graduated last term with

time of crisis



degrees which will equip them for missionary work. With two young children, they have lived a sacrificial lifestyle, putting their jobs second in order to study. Sandra is a social worker at a local school and was one of the lucky few state employees to be paid, for part at least, of the holidays. She remains cheerful: 'We can pay for food, but have to juggle paying bills!' Héctor and Sandra are well-qualified and keen, but what are their prospects for a future in mission?



Graduation ceremony: Héctor, Sandra and Paul

Fall in income

Paul is a board member of the AMI, the mission sending agency of the Baptist Convention of Argentina. He is helping Daniel Bianchi, its director, wrestle with problems brought about by the devaluation of the *peso* in January. When it was pegged one-to-one to the US dollar, transferring money to missionaries abroad was straightforward. But since devaluation, twice as many *pesos* are



'We really appreciate the help of Paul and Wilma.' Daniel Bianchi (left)

needed to buy the same amount in dollars. The AMI's funds are frozen in the bank, and to make matters worse their normal income is down 40 per cent. Everyone is feeling the squeeze, as Wilma recognises, 'People have to have a great deal of faith to give their extra pennies to mission.'

Daniel gives an example of the dilemma facing them: 'We had a family ready to go to Guinea-Bissau, west Africa. They'd got committed support for three years – then, all of a sudden, it was only worth half the amount. Their house is ready, their ministry in healthcare, church planting and evangelism is waiting for them, but how are they going to do it?'

He continues, 'The overwhelming issue for us is survival. We had an SOS from a family in Equatorial Guinea saying they
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Paul on mission

'Mission' is the subject Latin Link's Paul and Wilma Davies specialise in and one they continue to study. Paul talks about their work.

Argentina's cross-cultural missionary movement was one of the first in Latin America, and is still very young – less than 25 years old.

'It was given its impetus when OM's ship, the *Doulos*, docked in Buenos Aires in 1979. Argentinian Christians were inspired when they saw people of all nationalities involved in mission, as they came on board the ship to help.

'In 1982, Luis Palau was invited to address a Latin American pastors conference and as a result *Misiones Mundiales* (World Missions) was formed in Argentina, which was later accepted as the Argentina wing of Comibam International, the mission co-ordinators for the whole of Latin America.

'Wilma and I arrived on the scene in 1995. Our role is to help develop models of missionary training which are relevant – and possible – within the context here. We've spent time building relationships and have gradually been asked to teach, to write, to speak and contribute at conferences and consultations, run training courses and hold official positions.

'I realise that there is a traditional view that mission comes from the West, and that the idea of mission from a country like Argentina may be an unfamiliar one. A definition John Stott gave is that, "Mission is everything that God sent the church into the world to do." This means that when we get involved in mission, we are not working in a private project of our own – there is actually no mission of the British or Irish church, the Argentinian church, the North American church, or wherever. We all simply take part in the mission of God in the world.' ■

Paul Davies has produced a paper, '*After September 11th – Mission among Muslims.*' For a copy please telephone or email Latin Link's Communications Department.

ARGENTINA IN NEED OF A MIRACLE

Signs of the times in Bu

True revival?
People arrive for a Tuesday evening meeting at Rey de Reyes church in Belgrano in Buenos Aires fashionable downtown. Pastor Claudio Freitzen urges prayer and repentance for the nation. 500 people kneel to weep and pray.
In February evangelicals gather in town plazas for a national day of prayer.



When shops say they're closing down, in Argentina they really are. Some were looted – remember the despairing Korean shopkeeper on the BBC TV news? He later committed suicide.



In the prosperous, leafy suburb of La Lucila six shops have closed in the village high street. 25,000 businesses have gone bankrupt in Argentina in the last few months. Unemployment has soared to 22 per cent.



Buenos Aires



The 'Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo' began protesting 20 years ago about sons and daughters who 'disappeared' during the 'Dirty War'. These indomitable grandmothers are resolute in their weekly stand for justice.



With bank accounts frozen until 2004/5, foreign banks and financial institutions were attacked in protests before Christmas. The peso was devalued by 29 per cent in January.



Political graffiti: 'Give the left a chance' seen at a station, and 'Out with this corrupt, oppressive system' in front of the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace.



Street demonstrations: groups continue to come into the city to protest about living conditions.



McDamaged: people are angry that Argentina has sold out to international companies, their logos seen here near the Obelisk, Buenos Aires' famous landmark.

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had only 100 dollars left and could only hang on until the end of the month. Humanly, it's impossible to send people the right amount of money.'

He adds, 'It's not that finance is our priority, but finance touches everything.'

Paul and Daniel are investigating ways to channel money through bank accounts in the US or Europe. They are also hoping to make an official representation to the government, as Roman Catholic missionaries are free from these problems. 'It's a question of equality,' says Daniel. 'As evangelicals we have freedom, but equality is a long way away.'

New urgency

Such issues have long been the concerns of René Padilla: 'There has been little awareness of the need for the church to become involved in social and political issues,' he says, 'but now the government, together with the Roman Catholic church, has called for dialogue on what is needed for the country, to take place in consultation with the United Nations. It's an open invitation, so it's up to evangelicals to somehow organise themselves to put forward representatives.'

The involvement of Christians at national level is a challenge, especially when faith has been mainly confined to church life. There is hope that the recently formed National Evangelical Christian Committee, (similar to the Evangelical Alliance in Britain) will start to give evangelicals a voice.

At local level the churches are doing what they can to help in practical ways, through ministries like the 'kilo of love a month' scheme, where members bring rice, fruit or potatoes to share with people who are desperate, like a man Wilma sees carrying his bag of groceries home 40 blocks in the heat of summer.

Many Christians see the present crisis as an opportunity for change, for true revival. And, it seems, the nation is starting to turn to prayer as faith has been lost in the authorities and normal securities have been stripped away.

Humanly speaking Argentina's future looks bleak. But Argentina, like the rest of the world, needs to hear that with God a better future is possible. ■

Sharing the burden

Argentina has 500 people in cross-cultural mission. In ten years they want to have 2,500. If they are to succeed, they need good structures in place. Carlos Scott, vice-President of Comibam International shares his vision to train Argentinian Christians for mission.

In Argentina we've thought a lot about the form training should take. We're doing it through three integrated networks.

Missionary Training

This is a combination of formal academic training and practical experience. Personal development is vital if people are to show the fruit of the Spirit and work well with others from different agencies or churches – the best way to work, I think.

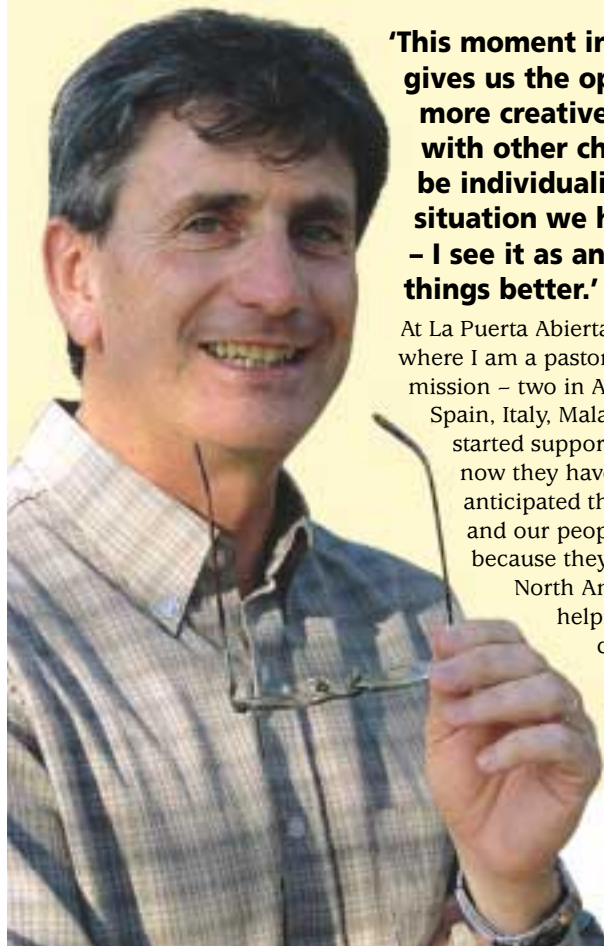
Sending Churches

Not all pastors have a missionary vision. A pastor can either be a key or a nail – he can open it up or nail it down. We need more 'keys' to open up possibilities, pastors to win other pastors and show churches how the whole Bible speaks of mission.

Sending Agencies

Agencies need the support of the local church, and workers sent to them by churches. They can then help the church play its part in preparing its people for mission.

With these three things in place I believe we can do some good work!



'This moment in Argentina gives us the opportunity to think more creatively, to get together with other churches. We tend to be individualistic, but in this situation we have to pull together – I see it as an opportunity to do things better.'

At La Puerta Abierta (The Open Door) church where I am a pastor, we have ten people in mission – two in Argentina, the others in Spain, Italy, Malaysia and Morocco. We started supporting them 100 per cent, but now they have other sources as well. We anticipated the current crisis somewhat and our people are less vulnerable because they have some support from North America. The church is also helping 36 families with food, clothing and medicines, and supporting five projects providing needy children with a meal each day. ■

From the heart

Anny Rosciani came to Britain from Argentina. She has been working with the Japanese community around Christ Church, North Finchley for three years. Recently she returned home for a visit.

Argentina is in complete chaos – people feel powerless and hopeless. I come from the Chaco region in the interior. My home church in Resistencia is an oasis with a strong sense of community. It is amazingly committed to mission and supports four people: one in an impenetrable part of the Chaco, two in Mongolia and myself in Britain. It has a local ministry with prisoners and while I was home nine women were allowed out to come to church for baptism.



Pastor José Luis Cinalli: 'Not all bad news.'

Each province of Argentina produces its own local currency – in Resistencia it's the *quebracho*. Wages are paid half in *quebrachos* and half in *pesos*, but *quebrachos* are worthless outside the province. The church cannot support missionaries with *quebrachos*, which are hard to exchange even for *pesos*.

'I feel torn apart'

The devaluation of the *peso* has hit the church hard. It took out a bank loan in dollars for a new building because the church had grown from about 250 people to 800. Now the loan has doubled and may go up even more. Yet my pastor, José Luis Cinalli is positive: 'In spite of the financial situation, it is not all bad news. The church is growing and getting more involved in social action.' He would love to come over to Britain and share with Christians here. He sees the crisis as a spiritual wake-up call.

In the Chaco region, a quarter of the population are evangelical Christians, so I ask myself why we are struggling with a high level of corruption? We are saving

souls, but we are not making an impact on society. People didn't want to be involved in politics because politics is corrupt, so they left the decision-making to corrupt people. The church has not produced the leaders we need today. I believe the student movement, nurturing Christian professionals, is the key. But is it too late?

'We are saving souls, but we are not making an impact on society'

I feel torn apart. I believe God has called me to my work with the Japanese. My prayers for accommodation and an extended UK visa were answered, yet sitting next to me in my church in



Argentina, a lady with three or four children was praying for food for that day. People like her are supporting me in mission.

One man in the church has a small company with 15 employees. He is in despair because he can't pay them – the company's money is held in the *corralito*, the frozen bank accounts. My own money was in a savings account in Argentina and now I cannot draw on it.

Did you know that 40 children in Argentina are dying each day because of lack of medicines? It's not reported in the papers. Why is the world taking so little notice? ■



Anny Rosciani: 'I found it really hard going to Sainsbury's when I returned.'

ARGENTINA IN NEED OF A MIRACLE

Our response

Churches in Argentina see the present crisis as an opportunity. Latin Link wants to support them in any way we can at this special time. We invite individuals and churches in Britain and Ireland to help us show solidarity, and care for our brothers and sisters in the following ways:

- Support Daniel Bianchi at the AMI struggling to pay mission salaries.
- Share the burden of Carlos Scott and La Puerta Abierta church supporting people in need.
- Help pastor José Luis Cinalli and the church in Resistencia to support Anny Rosciani in her work with Japanese women in London.
- Twin with a church in Argentina to share and encourage them through the crisis.
- Pray – use the information given in *Latinfile* to fuel your prayers; see also the Prayer Guide.

To help Latin Link channel resources to Argentina, please return the separate Response Slip. ■

Mission for the Third Millennium

'Not so much a conference, more an action plan' is how the organisers describe this international event convened to encourage and assist Latin American mission to and from Europe.

Join the movers and shakers in Latin mission, from Wednesday 12 to Saturday 15 June 2002 in Muswell Hill, north London. Speakers will include John Stott, George Verwer, Paulo Branco, Carlos Scott and Samuel Cueva. Further information from Latin Partners or www.missionforthethirdmillennium.org.uk

New Step

With this *Latinfile* comes the first issue of the newly-vamped *Step News*, with all the latest info about Latin Link's illustrious short-term mission programme. It's so good, we think everyone should know about it! ■



Latin Link thanks



for their help with travel bookings to Latin America.

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