



June 22, 2020

Greetings from what the Argentines are calling the “noventena”. Even the llamas have been affected 😊. We are currently in phase 5 in Salta which means we can have a form of church services starting this Sunday.

Cerrillos

Jackie has had business as usual taking care of the grounds in Cerrillos. We are currently unable to host anyone which means at least two major groups have had to be postponed. There were two seminary students from another province that were due to spend Mondays and Tuesdays with us, but there is still a prohibition to travel between provinces.

Since Jackie hasn't been able to host the women's meetings at church, she has been on a baking spree and all of the neighbors have benefited. She's also sent muffins to all of the families at church.

La Merced Church

There have been many positive things in spite of not being able to meet. Rod has been doing four devotionals per week via WhatsApp for the church members. Virtually none of them have computers but they can receive this form of message on their phones. We've gone through 1st Peter, 2nd and 3rd John, Philemon and are currently doing some Psalms.

We've been able to buy in bulk and deliver food to the families of the church. There are 14 different houses that have been receiving help. Many families have been on restricted incomes because they have informal jobs. All of the girls in the youth group come from families where the parents are not believers and they have especially appreciated the help.

Once church services resume, we have several cultural challenges. The service can't be more than 90 minutes and must be finished before 8:00 at night. In our culture, that's usually the start time for services (and they go until after 10:00 pm). People here are firm believers in greeting each other with “a holy kiss”. For the moment, the government only allows people to touch elbows. It's going to be interesting.

The Seminary

The Seminary has been the hardest hit by the quarantine. We had just started the introductory courses when we had to shut down. At first it was going to be for two weeks, but that was 90 days ago. We had to switch to virtual classes which meant that some people couldn't study because they didn't have access to internet. It also meant some of the older students had the challenge of trying to adapt to a virtual world.

We are currently in the fifth week of the first semester and everything is virtual. Some students huddle around a cell phone, others have computers, but since there have been no upgrades in internet service, some classes have gone well and some have suffered due to lack of bandwidth. At first Rod was hosting the classes from the house in Cerrillos, but there just wasn't enough bandwidth for 30+ connections. At present, he's spending the class time at the Seminary in Salta, including workshops and grad classes due to better connectivity.

There are more students studying from outside of the city of Salta and the Lerma Valley than ever before since they don't need to travel to classes. On the other hand, when we are able to start teaching with students in the classroom, only half will be able to attend due to social distancing. This means we'll need to do both types of teaching at the same time. It looks as if we'll have to film the classes for those who can't attend due to distance or space, but the time involved to upload a 3-hour class to YouTube with the internet connections we have in our part of Argentina is eight uninterrupted hours.

In the initial part of the quarantine Rod used the time as a mini-sabbatical. He was able to update and finish all but two commentaries. He is only lacking a few chapters of 2 Chronicles and the book of Esther to have commentaries written on the entire Bible. The final product of all of the commentaries will be approximately 3000 total pages not counting this year's student questions.

Medical Compassion

For those of you who are interested in details, Rod has just written a letter that only deals with the Medical Compassion ministry. Most medical facilities have been shut down in an effort to "protect the doctors". Things are just now opening and Rod is involved in helping three patients with special needs. The biggest medical news is the invitation to be part of the Bioethics committee of a medical school/teaching hospital/provincial program. After all the years of helping people with a team of doctors, some of the doctors recommended Rod to represent the Evangelical community on this committee. During the coming week he'll be meeting with the head of the committee (via Zoom). She is also the head of the provincial Corona virus team. We're amazed at how God has opened this door. Drop us a line if you want to read more.

Thanks again for all of your love, prayers and financial support.

His and yours, Rod and Jackie.