



## The challenge of making disciples...

Most Christians at some point have engaged with what is known as “the Great Commission” at the end of Matthew’s gospel. It is a familiar text to most and one which has been the basis or key text for many mission endeavours, and a quick google search will reveal how the text has been used, debated, and applied in a modern context.

Yet, going back to these words of Jesus we find a reference not to making converts, but to making disciples – the “all of life” experience of what it means to follow Jesus. Discipleship is a lifelong endeavour of growing, learning and changing. It cuts across all groups; age, denomination, economic, and political. It has that amazing power to bring us all onto the one level, as part of a new people of God, a new community. Jesus sets it out as it is, so let’s not complicate it... this is His commission to His church...make disciples “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

In planning for our season’s activities, we have tried to build into it things that will help us meet the challenge of this

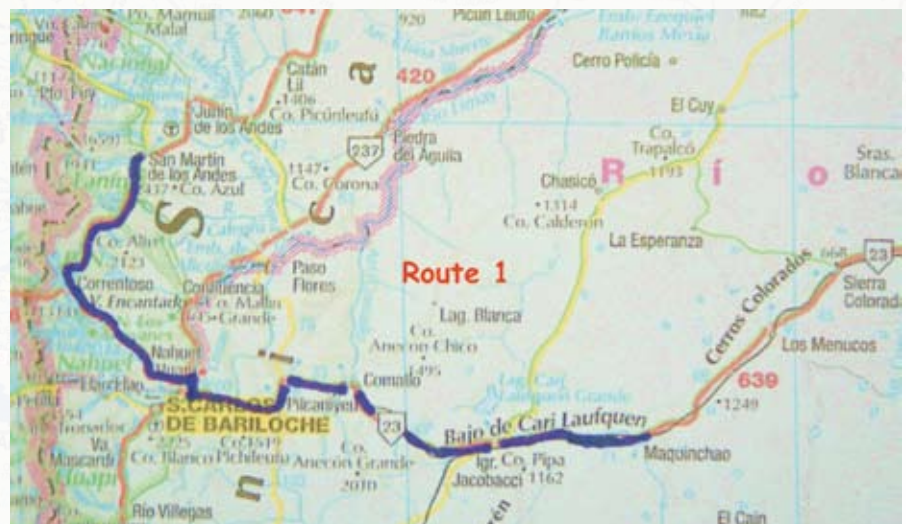
disciple-making commission of Jesus and take us beyond the town of San Martín de Los Andes. The concept of colporteur work is not a new one in Argentina or other Latin countries and has, over the centuries, been a regular and effective way of connecting isolated communities, bringing the gospel, and sharing resources for churches. The distances between towns mean that visits can, for reasons of practicality, sometimes only be once or twice a year, depending on where the colporteur is based.

At present the two colporteurs who travel as far south as San Martín and the neighbouring regions come from Buenos Aires and have well defined

routes which they travel, on average, every six months.

Having examined the itineraries of these workers, STS have put together a pilot project to develop a further two colporteur routes which will cover additional towns and open up an area towards the eastern coast. The first of these covers a route of approx. 900km, visiting 8 towns and the second a route of approx. 1,100km, covering 8 towns and cities to the south of San Martín.

Preparation for this work has entailed making contact with local Pastoral Councils and church communities, informing them that STS will be in the town to supply Bibles, books and other Christian literature,





but also to build relationships that will allow short presentations explaining what else STS can offer in terms of Workshops, Study Groups, Counselling, and Training in Counselling Practice.

Alongside this we have begun to reflect on how we can utilise the materials that we have and if they can be adapted for an online platform for people to access privately. This would require some significant work to make the materials platform ready but, as Argentina is one of the most online countries in the world, it also provides an opportunity to have an influence well beyond the reaches of San Martín and Patagonia. This will require thought and prayer as we would not want to lose the practical, applicable aspect of all that we seek to do and teach. Nevertheless, it would be something for the “long haul”, as it would

be a project that would easily reach into 2020.

Here is discipleship, whether by colporteur or by online access, helping others to learn and understand the things that Jesus has committed to his church and that ability to live out life as an alternative community.

In the meantime, we have to trust God for the outcome and make the initial moves. Starting out on any new dimension of work can be daunting at times, and we run the danger of expecting too much too soon. We remember that the Latin culture is a relational one and our God a relational God. Therefore, it is essential to take the time to build the contacts and relationships that will form the bridge across which STS can have input into these communities. This foundational “relationship building” began in February with direct contact with some

of the churches, and this will continue over the incoming months. We already have one request from a church community on Route 1 to meet with them and share about the work of STS and what we can offer. We have a trip planned for later this month. This we trust will be the first of many.



## Points for Prayer

Now that the STS programme for 2019 has begun we would ask that you continue to remember the work in San Martín and beyond in prayer. Here are some pointers to help...

**Finance** – like many mission organisations, finance is an ongoing issue. We give thanks for God’s provision so far this year, but we still have to look to him to provide for the way forward. Give thanks both for God’s faithfulness and for those who support the work of STS on a monthly basis. Pray that this number may increase during 2019 and that our funding applications to Trusts may also be successful and our financial obligations for 2019/20 met.

**Partnerships** – being in a more remote region of Argentina where there are no other organisations working nearby we are having to be inventive in thinking how we can build effective missional partnerships at a distance. Discussions with Latin Link are on-going in this regard, so please pray for wisdom as we look for a way ahead which will benefit both parties and that will glorify God as we seek to co-operate in mission in Argentina.

**Programme** – the 2019 programme has now begun and the regular series of events in San Martín underway. Pray for Pablo as he connects with others, plans and leads the weekly

events in San Martín, and also that the Lord will create a hunger for a deeper spiritual reality in others within the local churches... and that we can help meet that need. Pray also for leading and guidance as we explore the colporteur opportunities, for safety and protection in travelling and an openness to what we offer to local church congregations.

**Board** – please also continue to pray for the renewal of the Board. We need 2 new members who can help with administrative and publicity activities and be able to commit a number of hours to STS on a monthly basis to keep these areas up to date.



# When the story changes – Gabriela

A couple of years ago Gabriela, a 48-year-old mother of 4 teenagers, arrived with a friend, Miguela, at the STS office, and began to tell us her story. It became apparent in our conversation, which lasted throughout the afternoon, that Gabriela was not a happy woman. Not only was she the victim of domestic violence, which had destroyed her marriage, but she was living under the misapprehension that God was a vindictive God, just waiting for the slightest error on her part to swiftly execute his divine judgment upon her. The combination of both domestic and spiritual abuse impacted deeply.

For Gabriela, the voice of this God was heard week after week through the voice and preaching of the Pastor of her congregation. The messages that she heard, and threats that he meted out on a constant basis, were always reprimands, something to make sure that she would tithe, and give of her first fruits, and more than that, keep on giving, otherwise... God would curse her. This was Gabriela's God... one who looked for, and expected, total obedience on threat of divine curse and retribution.

Looking back at those years, it would be an understatement to say Gabriela was not a happy person. Not happy at work, life had no direction and felt so uncertain that she could not even think about or plan what she would like to do in an incoming week, let alone believe that she could have hopes and plans for the future. The demands of her pastor always kept Gabriela and her family on the breadline, with no possibility of improving her situation or the life of her family.

But today, in 2019, she is happy, and a very different person from the woman we met a couple of years ago. She has a life about which she never could have dreamed. It is not perfect, but in comparison, it is so different to the one she left behind.

In 2017 Gabriela started attending the Inductive Bible Study Group run by STS every Thursday night, and has continued to attend since then. Here she learned how to read Scripture and also learned some of the skills to enable her to study it for herself, and not be dependent on her pastor for what God wanted to say to her. She attributes the many changes in her life to her new understanding and refreshed relationship with God that has come about as a result.

She took a major decision in July 2018 and left the congregation she had been attending, and stepped away from the constant financial demands which were placed upon her to keep God's judgement at bay. Today she is no longer renting a house but living in her own home. She has earned enough to purchase new furniture, something she could not have done if she had remained in her old congregation where the demands placed upon her did not give her the financial freedom that she now enjoys.

Now she has a different perspective on the love and presence of God, and can see it reflected in the wonder of creation. Commenting recently, she stated "I leave work and look around and see all that God has created. I pray on the bus, when working, and at home...I know that God is with me wherever I am". Gabriela has found the presence of God to be the reason for hope and security, and that God is not someone who wants to punish her, but one who loves her for who she is. This is, for her, a new discovery.

One of the other benefits of attending the Study Group has been the friendships which she has formed with the other members. Towards the end of 2018 a group of 5 women from the group travelled together to spend a weekend in Villarica, Chile, to celebrate the birthday of the mother of one of them. Reflecting



on this, Gabriela has said that she would never have imagined such a personal, intimate experience with sisters in the faith. What's more, coming from the experience, the question arose as to when the STS study group could hold a spiritual retreat so that they could all share this experience together?

A recent change to her work has impacted her Thursday routine and means she leaves for work at 7.00am, and the distance and bus timetables make it difficult to return home for her family before the Study Group. To maintain the opportunity



# Southern Theological Seminaries

108 Kings Road  
Belfast  
BT5 7BX

e: [stsbelfast@gmail.com](mailto:stsbelfast@gmail.com)  
w: [stsargentina.wordpress.com](http://stsargentina.wordpress.com)  
Northern Ireland charity number: NIC100376

to study and grow, and to facilitate this changing situation, STS have started a further Study Group on Tuesday afternoons, from 4.30pm to 5.30pm, which we hope will also appeal to others who have been unable to attend the Thursday evening group. For Gabriela, this allows her to spend less time outside her home, and to be with her three teenage children and keep a balance to her study time and

family commitments.

Gabriela's story changed...Her life has changed... Her relationships have changed...both with God, who she now understands loves her, and also with those around her, and in the friendships she has found in her brothers & sisters in faith. In all of this we see the message of the gospel made flesh. God comes to reconnect us to himself and to each other.

Today, at the beginning of 2019, she looks to the future with hope, thanks to her study of God's Word.

In all of this, the goal of STS remains the same: "To see lives transformed." Gabriela's story is just one of a number whose lives have been changed by engaging with the Word of God and in doing so, finding freedom and a different quality of life.

## STS – How is it Financed?

Some may wonder what happens to the funds that are donated to STS and how they are used. As a charitable organisation, we use all of our income towards the promotion and funding of the work in the San Martín de Los Andes region. All who are involved with STS in the UK are volunteers and offer their time and commitment to the project freely, which ensures that almost all funds go directly to the work.

God has been good to us since our beginnings in 2010, and funding has been a mix of Grants, regular giving and one-off gifts. Currently we are dependent on grant funding to keep STS financially stable, and there is a need to address this and bring a more balanced and sustainable basis to our funding through regular giving, but God has been good and we give him thanks for his continued provision.

A summary of our income and expenditure over the past two years has been outlined in the tables below, and in the first quarter of the year we have received 23% of our projected budget for 2019, against a target of 25%. We would ask you to pray that the remaining funds come in for 2019 and look to God to place it upon the hearts of individuals, congregations, and funding bodies to meet the need.

It is anticipated that for 2019, STS will require an income similar to 2018 of approx. £30,000 of which an estimated

- 48% will provide personnel costs;
- 20% Summer Teaching Project costs;
- 15% Accommodation costs;
- 10% Utility and Course provision costs
- 5% Reserves
- 2% UK admin costs

If you feel this is something you would like to be a part of, either by helping fund what we seek to do, or just to pray for us, please see either the funding page of our website [stsargentina.wordpress.com](http://stsargentina.wordpress.com) or email [stsbelfast@gmail.com](mailto:stsbelfast@gmail.com).

