

Dear Everyone

Greetings from a cold and rainy San Francisco. May has days similar to a wet windy English Autumn. By next month we will be into Winter dry season and it probably won't rain again until October or November .



If a week is a long time in politics, how might we describe a fortnight in the life of a church? The Gloria de Dios congregation had been going along nicely, even growing numerically, over the past year since Argentina's first lockdown. The one real ongoing difficulty was of jealousy and competition among some of leadership. Stereotypical beliefs about leadership in Argentina, both in and out of the church, are centred around the "strong man"; someone who "gets things done" through throwing their weight around while being accountable to no-one. Why this is so is open to debate, but centuries of subjugation under foreign rule will certainly have played their part. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, those who seek leadership positions often do so less to champion a different model than to be "the one"; or as Brazilian educator Paulo Freire explains, in oppressive systems, the oppressed tend to aspire not to liberation so much as to become the oppressor.

In the church, these stereotypes can take a further twist since churches typically use terminology of *El Siervo*, "The Servant" (capitalised) to refer to those in leadership, encouraging congregants to internalise a grotesque parody of "servanthood" as a powerful authoritarian striding up and down the stage and barking out unquestioned orders from the front. This scenario is sadly an all too common reality played out in churches up and down Argentina, and in a church such as the Gloria de Dios which operates a fairly open leadership team, what could have been a model of leading by consensus, valuing everyone's contribution, turns into a jockeying for territory. Into this context, enter *La Profeta*, "The Prophetess" who was invited from another city by one of the leadership team to share her ministry aka shouting from the front, with the church. Opinion was always somewhat divided about her presence and her calling, although initially there was significant enthuseasm. However, to cut short a story with many twists and turns, by the end of her second visit, the congregation had split into warring factions, with several people leaving, including two of the leadership team, one of the whom was the person who originally invited her, who has apparently gone off with some followers to start another church.

As for our roles in the current situation, at the moment we are watching and waiting for the dust to settle to understand what the longer term effects might be, both positive and negative, for the church and its members. In the meanwhile we continue to teach where we can, listen to those who want to talk, pray, and try to maintain discerning eyes and ears as we accompany the congregation through this difficult time. We also intentionally seek to model leadership and service without demanding status, and to live out an incarnational theology that recognises that all are made in the image of God, and which demonstrates his restoring love in our day to day relationships and through the lifestyle that we have chosen.



The family are all fine and in good spirits despite the new Covid restrictions. We have also unexpectedly this week taken ownership of one Capuchino, who is a beautiful, friendly, fat, lazy and fully disrespectful equine. Martin has taken on a challenge to work together with some of the youngsters at the riding school to make a good horse out of him. Thank you for reading, and for your ongoing prayers and support. Have a good month!

Hazel X Martin



Joni & Daniel

