

## Greetings from Bolivia!



*"If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." (Psalm 139:9-10 NIV)*

It's wonderful to be able to greet you from Sucre, Bolivia. I have much to give thanks for and much to update you about!

### **Commissioning Service**

The commissioning service on Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September at Smithton Church went very well. I was humbled, delighted, and thankful that so many people came, including my family members who travelled and those who came from other churches. It was such a blessing to welcome you into Smithton Church and I believe it was a great witness to the Lord. Christine Perkins from Pioneers UK and Geoff Hulks representing the Smithton Missions Committee spoke very well.



I shared my thanks and some thoughts regarding mission and the time ahead in Bolivia. Alasdair Macleod our Minister and some of the elders made a lovely commissioning prayer and then afterwards we had a barbecue outside. Again, the whole occasion was such a blessing to us as a congregation as well as those visiting. So, thank you for your prayers for that occasion and it all went incredibly well.

### **Getting Prepared**

We're also thankful that we believe we've got a good tenant for the flat and we hope and pray that that will go well. We've been able to meet this person and an agreement has been made so we would value continued prayer for God to protect our home and that it would be a blessing to our tenant, and to us as a family.



I'm so thankful again for answered prayer for the logistics of packing up and organising the house and packing my things for Bolivia. My sister Christine came through from Portree and together we were able to organise the flat and get it ready for our new tenant. Simultaneously, we were also packing four large suitcases for this new season in Bolivia.

## The Journey Begins

Another huge subject for prayer was the journey itself. The first challenge was to actually organise what I needed for Bolivia into four suitcases. I was thankful for friends and members of the missions committee and again, my sister, for helping just to get the suitcases into a vehicle for the journey down the A9 to Edinburgh Airport.

The first part of the journey went very well. I was delighted to see Ruth Box, my friend and Pioneers UK Mobiliser at the airport. We had a lovely lunch, together with Angus who had taken me down in his car, and then in a process that often causes me quite a bit of stress, we had to weigh and check each item of luggage. I was not surprised that two suitcases were overweight and two were underweight, so it took a bit of juggling to move things around. However, I am so thankful that they all got checked in with no extra expenses. That was a great answer to prayer and a great relief!



## Edinburgh to Frankfurt to Sao Paulo, Brazil

As you may remember from the flight schedule, the first leg was an evening flight to Frankfurt. That went well and I was on time to connect with the Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Brazil. I was concerned that I hadn't seen my friend Hector at the boarding gate and I asked about his flight from Manchester. I was told that it was delayed but was still expected to be in on time. I was already sitting in my seat on the aeroplane when, delighted and relieved I saw Hector arrive.



Arriving into San Paulo, Brazil was not easy. I was trying to navigate whether I needed to pick up my luggage and go through customs or not. We were getting mixed messages and Hector and I were separated at one point during the security checks. Anyway, everything was all right and we were eventually reunited. We were assured that our suitcases were all checked through to Bolivia and not delayed and that also was an answer to prayer. As I was sitting on the plane in a window seat, ready to depart from San Paulo for Bolivia I actually saw my four suitcases being loaded onto the aeroplane so that was wonderful.

## Santa Cruz to Sucre, Bolivia

Arriving into Santa Cruz, Bolivia we had a very tight window of time to get through immigration, baggage reclaim, customs, and check-in for the next flight. I'm again so thankful to Hector for his help with the Spanish language. The immigration person was asking lots of questions about my special purpose visa but it all was OK eventually and we were able to pick up our suitcases. All our luggage had arrived, but customs took a bit of extra time because one of my suitcases and Hector's suitcase were pulled aside for extra checks.

However, again we were able to navigate that and rush to the check in desks to put all my four suitcases on the scales. I was sent somewhere else to pay for the excess luggage but it all went well and with minutes to spare, we got through security and were ready to board our flights. That was where we said our goodbyes. Hector



was going to a different part of Bolivia to a men's conference and I was heading south to my final destination, Sucre.

### Sucre, Bolivia

I was so delighted, thankful and relieved to arrive in Sucre. Greg Muir, the Pioneers Bolivia Team Leader, had been able to get permission to actually come through to the baggage reclaim area to assist me. He helped load my suitcases and then proceed out to the arrivals area where we met with Lily his wife. It was lovely to reunite with her. I have to say I was really feeling exhausted from the journey at that stage. I was quite dehydrated and hungry as it had been hard to maintain my fluid intake and nutrition over all the different flights and airports.



It was about an hour in the car from the airport to their home and let's just say that it didn't take me long to have a quick shower, a quick snack, hydrate with lots of fluids and then lie flat and go to sleep. I had started my journey about 10:00 on the Wednesday morning, and of course was up earlier, and it was probably close to midnight UK time on the Thursday when I was able to actually just stop and rest – I was truly exhausted!

### Hitting the Ground Running

So how do I describe my first two weeks? I had some rest on Friday and Saturday then Sunday ended up being quite a long, busy, hot day. We left about 09:00 to go to church from 10:30 to 12:30, had some lunch and then drove an hour out of the city to visit the church youth camp and returned home some time after 18:00.



On Monday Greg and I went into the city to begin the many processes necessary for immigration. We first changed some money, then made some bank deposits and got a SIM card for my phone. There were visits to different police stations to have my fingerprints taken and to fill out paperwork for Interpol and we had to go to the hospital to get a medical certificate.



Another day I needed to visit the hospital in the early morning, at 07:00 after fasting, to get blood tests and X-rays. A further visit was required to bring the results of the X-ray to the doctor and then to come back again to pick up the certificate. So there has been a lot of movement around the city involving visits to many different offices, and that has been a significant part of the last couple of weeks.

The physical aspects of being at an altitude of 9,300 feet here in Sucre are not easy and acclimatising to the high altitude is not a quick adjustment. I feel breathless with even the smallest of exertions such as walking, and walking up some of the hills in the city becomes a challenge. Even just walking up one flight of stairs means having to stop at the top of the stairs to catch my breath with my heart racing. The combination of this with the heat, with temperatures in the mid to high 20's throughout the day, is a real challenge. Moving about a busy noisy city with heavy traffic travelling in the opposite direction to what I'm used to in the UK, very narrow pavements and lots of open drains takes some getting used to. I can feel however though that things are improving so I'm thankful for that.



### Immersion – Language and Culture



On my first Monday, after a busy morning with visits to the bank, immigration and police offices I moved in with a lady called Lucia. This is part of immersion in learning the language and culture and I will be staying with Lucia for my first month. She is a lovely older Christian lady who does not speak any English and I speak virtually no Spanish, so it has been an interesting and sometimes exhausting aspect of the last couple of weeks to be staying with her.

I am so very thankful for her kindness, her hospitality and her generosity. We have had many moments of humour either with our nonverbal communications or trying to navigate Google translate to figure things out. She has been taking me out to the local market to buy food and fruits and vegetables. There's much more to share about this immersion experience and that will maybe be in the next newsletter update.

I also began language lessons and I do two hours every day between 10:00 AM and midday. I am surrounded by Spanish here in Sucre. I am completely immersed in the language and it's all around me in the home, the community, in the markets and in the church I've been attending. The language lessons are important as I try and learn Spanish and attempt to understand something of the grammar and the pronunciation. My language teacher is a vibrant young man called Yelson. He has strong opinions about lots of things but I'm enjoying getting to know him and he certainly has his work cut out trying to teach me Spanish.

I have found, with my tired and sometimes exhausted mind that I stumble through with a bit of Gaelic, a bit of Luganda and some Spanish. For some reason, rather than getting into my head 'por favor' which is 'please' in Spanish, ironically the French phrase 'sil vous plait' comes into my mind, and I know virtually no French!



## Church

The first Sunday I worshipped at the church of Greg and Lily, the Evangelical Baptist Church that I went to last year. Then my second Sunday I went to church with Lucia. Afterwards we went to eat fish with her friend Lynette and it was a delight to also have time with her children, Emanuel and



Gabriel. They seemed fascinated and intrigued with Google translate and the fact that I could speak into the phone and it would speak out the interpretation in Spanish. Emmanuel wants to play chess with me as that is one of his favourite activities. Gabriel wants to show me, and maybe even teach me, some Bolivian dance. It was a great joy to get to know them all, with more new experiences, new food, and new fruits.



## Prayer

Please pray:

- Giving thanks that my journey to Bolivia went well and all my luggage arrived with me this time
- For smooth completion of all the logistics and requirements for life and ministry in Bolivia
- For learning the language and culture and the immersion experience while staying with Lucia
- For developing relationships with the Pioneers Bolivia Team, Lucia, Yelson and other friends that I'm meeting
- That I would continue to acclimatise to the higher altitude, heat and life in Sucre
- That I would find a place to call home

## Thanks

I have recognised for some time that there are so many new aspects to this season of my life – a new organisation, new continent, new country, new people group, new team, new language, new culture, new ministry. I have a strong sense of thankfulness that I'm actually physically here now in Bolivia and a real sense that this is where I am meant to be. I know and believe that God has led and guided me here.

It has certainly been an intense first couple of weeks that at times has been challenging and exhausting physically and mentally, for body, mind and spirit, and yet I'm very thankful for encouragements and the times that I have had for rest. I thank you so much for your prayers and value your partnership for this new season.

With humble thanksgiving,

***Marsali***