

## CWS Gran Chaco Program: "I am your neighbor"

Who **is** your neighbor? Wow, is that a loaded question! We're told in the Gospel of Matthew: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," so it's important for us to figure out who our neighbors are! Maybe your neighbors are a family of four, an elderly person down the hall or a farmer living acres away. What if your neighbor—who may have lived next to you for as long as you can remember—was in danger of losing their home? How would you respond?

Now what if I told you we have neighbors in South America's Gran Chaco region who are facing this very situation?

I want to share a quick story about one of our neighbors in this region, Epifanio Leiva, who leads his community of 390 indigenous families. It's a small community...and it's quite literally getting even smaller. In just two decades, these families have lost more than half of their land to non-indigenous settlers. Think back to your own neighbors. Imagine if someone took over half their house, told them they couldn't use water, bathrooms or the kitchen. How would they survive?

It's not so different with our neighbors in the Gran Chaco. Without land rights, communities like Epifanio's are not allowed to farm or work the land for food. And their water sources are inconsistent. The conversation about land is such a priority that one community even sold their cattle to pay for legal fees so that they could start the land claim process. I should note - the cattle were gift from a local NGO in response to their food needs. **But the gift didn't address the community's underlying issues of hunger - which is their access to land.** Without land, chronic malnutrition in children below the age of five in some communities of the Gran Chaco, reach as high as **72 percent**. That's nearly 3 out of 4 children who are unnecessarily suffering when there is enough land, and food, for all!

**But there's good news.** Through the support of partners of the CWS Gran Chaco Program, Epifanio was able to successfully advocate for his community at the legal level and regain access to resources and their land. This land rights case took a year, but the results will have a long-term impact. It means that our neighbors can begin rebuilding their identity, their homes and the environment.

Epifanio's story has a happy ending, but we can't forget the many other groups in the Gran Chaco who continue to live in a landless limbo. By participating in this week's offering, you're reaching out to the vulnerable to restore a home in the Gran Chaco. **You're being a neighbor at a time when good neighbors are needed the most!**

*(We suggest taking an offering or telling your congregation how they can support the CWS Gran Chaco Program.)*

