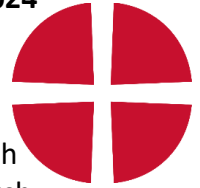




February/March 2024
Newsletter: 14



Melissa Newell
Mission Partner with
the Methodist Church

They say that a week is a long time in politics, and in my case, I'm trying to backtrack almost 3 months of goings on in Ecuador, ranging from Christmas, to mum and dad's visit, a State of Emergency (yes, another one), the declaration of an internal state of war, a very disrupted January, a more normal February and somehow it's already the middle of March. This newsletter probably won't cover everything, but here goes.

I had a lovely Christmas in Misahualli, with an Ecuadorian Christmas Eve, an American Christmas Day, a British Christmas mid-week dinner and a visit from Global Mission Fellow, Grace Luna, from the Philippines. Then on 2nd January, my mum and dad arrived in Ecuador. We visited the sights in Quito and the equator, before soaking in the volcanic hot springs in the town of Papallacta (which means 'town of potatoes' so we felt right at home) and then headed to the weekend's activities in Misahualli.



Community lunch cooking team
(Church Christmas Dinner)

January 7th was a momentous day, marking my birthday, which we celebrated with members of the church at a local restaurant. As we were having dinner, little did we know that on the other side of Ecuador, a huge jail heist was taking place, as one of the most notorious gang lords in Ecuador escaped from prison and disappeared without trace. The following day, a State of Emergency was declared, and the day after that, Ecuador's new President, Daniel Noboa declared that Ecuador was now in an 'Internal State of Conflict'. Things were tense for a while, and unfortunately, many church activities were cancelled as schools were also closed. This meant the end of mum and dad's time was very interrupted and unfortunately, they didn't get to see all the church activities I work with, but we still had a fantastic time together. In the midst of this, my 2-year visa was also due to expire! There were a few stressful days in Tena and Quito, but the renewal application was submitted and granted. It's incredible to think that I've been in Ecuador for over 2 years now. As I write this, we are still officially in both a State of Emergency and an Internal State of Conflict, but life has more or less returned to normal.



Turkey in the Amazon with
(nearly) all the trimmings



Left to right: 1. Presentation in Misahualli of gifts from Northern Ireland, 2. Dinner marking my birthday and parents' visit 3. Meeting with Bishop Alfredo Pilatuña in Quito



The easiest thing to recount was the visit of a mission team from the University of South Carolina. This is the 3rd year I've been with the team, but it was exciting to have them based in Misahualli this year and working in each of the communities where we work. There was the usual mix of anti-parasite pills, and medical conditions caused by the strong equatorial sun, humidity of the rainforest and malnutrition. As always, it was an emotional week, as many people received glasses and basic medical care, but there are also many cases we cannot help, other than stressing the importance of getting further medical attention as soon as possible. I was very proud of how the church members from Misahualli stepped up and helped out as much as possible. Overall, despite the long days, ups and downs, and a tired, hot, sweaty and bitten-many-times over team, we were very grateful for their visit and trust they will also have been blessed by spending a week in our beautiful part of Ecuador.



News in brief

- We were delighted to welcome a new member to our church in Misahualli – friends, Tyler and Kaylan Foster, serving with another organisation in Misahualli welcomed their daughter in February, and her name is Melisa! Asides from the excellent choice of name, it's also funny that there are now two of us in the church!
- English classes continue as always. We had a special event mid-February for everyone who attends.



Especially pray for the adults' classes. Community lunches and work in the indigenous communities continue as well.

- In February, I returned to El Pijal church near Otavalo in the Andes, spending time with their Compassion sponsorship programme, the music practice and speaking on Sunday morning. It is always lovely to visit other churches, especially as it is something I don't get to do often as I am usually involved in Sunday services in Misahualli.



Looking forward

"Vivan las alabanzas": a weekend of training events and workshops for worship leaders takes place on 12-14th April. I am part of the organising committee, headed by Volunteers in Mission, David and Shari Nelson from Colorado, who are here for three months. For this, we have another team coming from Colorado, USA. Although it is occupying a lot of my time at the moment, we are very excited and preparations are well underway between the American team, the Ecuadorean side and those of us who are somewhere in-between, even if we are starting to feel the pressure a little. I am also currently preparing Zoom workshops in the leadup to the event, which start on Tuesday 19th March.

Prayer points

Giving thanks for:

My parents' safe and enjoyable visit in January.

The renewal of my visa.

The visit of the medical and optometry team from South Carolina and the work they did.

The knowledge and experience built up from the past two years in Ecuador, allowing me to serve the church in Ecuador.

Community relationships and friendships in Misahualli, and other parts of Ecuador.

Praying for

Thank you to everyone praying for the future of Lay Mission in the Methodist Church. Please continue to pray for this, and for me specifically at this time.

As mentioned above, pray for the Worship Weekend coming up in April, all the ongoing preparations, the US team's visit and me as I prepare one of the talks, other sections and many of the logistics of the weekend.

Everyone who comes to English classes, the community lunches, church services, children's activities and youth meeting.

For Pastora Fabiola, the church leaders, and me (and my currently packed schedule).



Beautiful view of Imbabura Volcano and San Pablo lake from El Pijal Methodist Church



Presentations at our English event in February



A hand painted gift from Maria for my birthday

*Continually grateful for your prayers and support,
Wishing you God's richest blessing,*

Melissa

