

## **PARTNERSHIP VISIT REPORT to PERU August 4-16 2015**

### **AIMS:**

- To accompany the Vice President of the Methodist Conference, Dr Jill Barber, on her overseas visit and act as interpreter
- To further develop our relationship with our partner church - the “Iglesia Metodista del Peru” – the Methodist Church in Peru
- To explore the context of the Church in 3 diverse regions and learn firsthand about their projects
- To meet the 3 Nationals in Mission that the MCB supports and hear about their work and contexts
- To meet with Rev Julio Rojas Flores – Director of AMIPASTOR, an organisation we support

Peru is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest country in South America, bordering Colombia and Ecuador in the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, Chile to the south and Brazil and Bolivia to the east. Peru has a wide variety of native languages. Other languages have been recognized by the Constitution, such as Quechua, which is spoken in many Andean regions in different varieties.

Inca and European cultures clashed when the Spanish *conquistadors* arrived in the 16th century. The Spanish colonialists saw the indigenous culture as a threat and their beliefs as idolatrous and so they tried to stamp out those beliefs and also the people. Those cultures are still very evident, particularly in the Cusco area where Quechua is the original and still widely used language although Spanish is the official language and is used in most of the country.

### **The Methodist Church in Peru**

The Methodist Church in Peru is situated in the Andean region of South America where Catholicism and secularism are dominant. Methodist work in Peru dates back to the late 1870s. The first Methodist church of Callao was founded in 1889. It was the first evangelical Spanish-speaking church in Peru. Most of the members were migrants from the rural areas. Marginalised by society, they found a warm welcome in the church. The vision of a developing and growing church led the missionaries to set up several schools, which today are among the best educational institutions of the country. The Methodist Church of Peru became autonomous in 1970. As a church with many challenges they seek to transform lives through the proclamation of the gospel and the promotion of social action. The church operates in a ‘multicultural society’, because of the various indigenous cultures and is spread over 3 distinct regions – the highlands, the Amazon rain forest and the coast with 165 churches organised into 6 districts.

We received a very warm welcome from the Methodist Church in Peru who looked after us and were very attentive to ensuring our safety. They showed us the very many different faces of Peru, both in terms of location, climate and culture. Although it meant some extremely early starts (3.30am is not a joke!) it meant we learnt loads and went away with a much clearer picture of the context in which the Church works, their blessings and also challenges.

## LIMA



Our base was the bustling, busy, traffic congested city of Lima. Our meetings were held in “**La Casa Metodista**” (**Methodist House**) – an impressive, large, now heritage listed building, that the church bought back in 1965, but from 2000-2014 it was rented out and sadly became run down. Now that the church manages it once more they see it as an important hub in a strategic location and are keen to restore it and turn it into the main HQ for the church. Their vision is to provide accommodation, offices to rent out to raise income and space to hold meetings and address the training needs of the church. This

is a huge challenge for the church both economically in terms of the funds they need to raise and in terms of time and effort, but one that the Church believes is right to take on. **Bishop Samuel Aguilar-Curi** (seen here in the picture with Luis Ruis, one of the NMAs) has been in post since March 2014 and since that time they have undergone an in-depth analysis of the church and needs of its members across the country.

One of the biggest challenges that the Church is facing is the training of presbyters. There are only 15 trained Ministers in the whole of the country, caused principally due to the closure of the main Methodist seminary around 10 or so years ago and so the only option is to go to another country to train or to participate in distance learning led by a UMC missionary from Chile based in Lima with one or two face to face workshops per year. Most of the churches are led by 74 lay pastors who have a varying amount of training, but all with willing hearts and a passion to serve God and their communities. Face to face learning is made more difficult since the great distances involved mean that travel is impossible for most lay leaders who have families or due to economic difficulties. Added to this, IT difficulties mean that distance learning is often difficult to access. We discussed the possibilities of how the MCB could perhaps help to partner with the Church in training more leaders as this is obviously an area of great need.



On one of the Sundays we were there, Jill preached in “**La Primera Iglesia Metodista de Lima**” – the first Methodist Church in Lima, translated this time by Juan Flores – a member of the church who now lives in the States, but happened to be visiting Lima at the time, and gave me a bit of a break from my translation duties! Also in Lima the church were able to benefit from Jill’s huge knowledge and expertise on heritage as she was invited to give a seminar to a group of Methodist lay people on heritage and mission.

In Lima we also met with Rev Julio Rojas Flores – Director of AMIPASTOR, who we support with a small annual grant. Pastor Flores is a trained social anthropologist, specialising in rural development and mission. Due to timing constraints we were unable to go to Ayacucho to meet with him and so he travelled to Lima on an overnight bus to meet with us and attend other meetings. AMIPASTOR work with rural and native communities who live in extreme poverty, particularly those located in the Andes and whose primary source of employment is in small-scale agriculture. These communities speak Quechua amongst other native languages. This year, Amipastor's focus has been in helping small-scale farmers find an alternative to growing coca leaves (Peru is a major cocaine exporter), so AMIPASTOR has provided training in coffee cultivation, as well as workshops on forming coffee growing associations that in turn have allowed these communities access to basic services such as running water and electricity. We have had the pleasure of sampling the coffee in the mission and advocacy cluster!

One morning we had a presentation on the work of PROVEA – a National Volunteers Network, set up by the church which spans the entire national territory. The work is coordinated by Luis Ruíz Peñaherrera who the World Mission Fund supports as a National in Mission. The aim of PROVEA is to equip church members in social, economic and community development to help with improving the quality of life of extremely impoverished communities. The network is an ensemble of people including ministers, lay workers, leaders and various professionals from local churches. We met with some of these members – for example, Luz Landa (Leader of Methodist Women in Peru), a doctor, a dentist and a disaster and risk management specialist – members of the congregation who give of their time to volunteer in the community. Peru, being such a diverse country and subject to extreme weather conditions often has to face national declared emergencies. Most recently the network mobilised volunteers to support communities in the town of Chosica (in the Lima province) which was seriously affected by landslides.

## Tarapoto



*Travelling by motorcar became our favourite transport to keep cool!  
Photo shows us with Angela and Rosa's husband giving us a ride!*

On our second day in Peru we took an early flight leaving a drizzly, cool Lima for the hot, humid and sweaty climate of Tarapoto - on the edge of the Amazon rainforest, with temperatures in the mid to late 30s. Here we were hosted by Víctor Tarazana, one of our Nationals in Mission and his wife Angela Mariategui, who together coordinate evangelism and community development in the Amazon region. They also help to promote the Church's community development programmes amongst the local communities.

Both originally from Lima they used to work as psychologists, but left their developing careers behind when they felt called to mission. They have been working in the region for the last year building on the work started by a Brazilian missionary couple.



Their main focus is to consolidate the work in the area by discipling the young, small church fellowship and building up a core leadership. We thoroughly enjoyed our time spent with the core group and with Victor and Angela. They are a wonderful young couple with a passion for Christ and desire to bless the people, despite often difficult circumstances in what is a predominantly a very poor and needy area.

One member of the congregation – Rosa was an inspiration to us. She has an incredible joy – we shared many a joke with her! Recently

with the help and support of the church she won a competition and was granted the means and support from a Canadian NGO to run a small business venture out of her home, making soya based products to sell. Soya is grown in abundance in Peru and is used to counter malnutrition. Rosa sells what she makes to support her family but also each day finds ways to serve the local community by giving away food.

We also spent time on the Saturday observing the Sunday (or Saturday!) School which has a growing number of children from the community who come to learn about the bible and do aerobics to worship music – this is one way in which Victor and Angela are reaching out to the community.

*Here is Rosa in her specially built kitchen with her son and daughter, who also help her, together with Jill*



## Cusco

Towards the end of our visit we headed to Cuzco on another early morning internal flight – by now we were becoming very familiar with Lima airport! Cuzco (or Cusco) was the historic capital of the Inca Empire from the 13th into the 16th century until the Spanish conquest and is the gateway to the famous World Heritage Site Machu Picchu, the ancient Incan city set high in the Andes mountains. Cuzco is at high altitude – some 3,400 metres above sea level and so on arriving at the airport we stepped off the airplane to light headedness, shortness of breath and a bit later in the day headaches – this is all normal but quite funny to experience. In Cusco that evening we met and chatted to a small delegation from the church there over the traditional *coca* tea which is famous in that region and is also said to help combat the effects of altitude sickness – it certainly helped us! The group was headed by the superintendent of the Church there – Pastor Valerio Casilla, and amongst others Rev Theodore Uribe and Rev Isabel Casilla (the superintendent's sister). Rev Isabel is the first Quechua speaking female presbyter in Peru. She has recently started an outreach work in the District of Puno through evangelism, discipleship, promoting Christian values and principles while respecting the local indigenous cultures (90% of the city of Puno's 200,000 inhabitants are Aymaras or Quechuas). Puno is a challenging remote area to live and work – it frequently suffers from severe cold weather. Please pray for Rev Isabel (who is our newest NMA in Peru) – her task is a great challenge but she has an overwhelming passion and love for God and to further his Kingdom.



We also spent a morning on the outskirts of Cusco in an area marked by extreme poverty. We met and shared fellowship with a core group from the “Quebrada” church headed by Pastor Exaltación Suclli. Their services are bilingual - in Quechua and Spanish and we were treated to a worship song by the group sung in Quechua! The church in and around Cuzco is growing quickly as the church reaches out to the people who come into Cusco for work from the surroundings areas and they are fast outgrowing their building. Their most urgent need, once more, is for training for their lay workers.



*The pictures below show Pastor Exaltacion and Pastor Casilla with Jill and Pastor Exaltacion's wife in traditional Quechua dress!*



No visit to Cuzco, or Peru for that matter, would be complete without a trip to the UNESCO World Heritage of Machu Picchu! We set off at 5am travelling first in a car for an hour and a half to the village of Ollantaytambo where we caught the tourist train for another hour and a half to arrive at Machu Picchu pueblo (village). From here we caught a bus to take us to the summit of Machu Picchu 25 minutes later. If you have more time

then it's advisable to spend the night in one of the surrounding villages such as Aguas Calientes before heading to the summit – to beat the crowds and cut down the travelling all in one go! But our efforts were all worth it! There is only one word to describe the ancient city and views – spectacular!

It had been raining all morning, and everyone on the train and bus was worried about the summit being shrouded in mist, which would have meant poor views. Thankfully, shortly after arriving at the summit, the sun came out and the views were stunning. It's incredible to learn that such an ancient civilisation existed up here and that it remained unknown to the outside world until 1911 and also that it was never discovered by the Spanish conquerors. After spending 4 hours hearing about the history and wandering around taking more photos than we will ever need, we started back on our long journey, grateful for this opportunity and blessing to have had such an experience.

**Back in Lima** for a day before heading back to the UK, we rounded off our visit with a morning spent visiting the famous schools I mentioned in the introduction - La Victoria School, María Alvarado School and the "Colegio América" – all founded many years ago by Methodist missionaries from the

US - the latter being the oldest which celebrates 124 years of existence this year! The schools which were diverse in the resources they have and students that attend all reflect strong roots of Methodism and Methodist values. In La Victoria one group of students aged 15-17 had prepared a presentation for us in English telling the story of how they had begun as a school and their Methodist roots – you can see them in the picture on the stage below!



*Special thanks to the whole team at "La Iglesia Metodista del Peru" - Bishop Samuel Aguilar, Lidia Díaz and Luis Ruiz who accompanied us in Lima, Dora Canales (Wesleyan Theological Seminary and UMC missionary), Fernando Oshige, Víctor Tarazona Olórtegui and Angela Mariátegui (Tarapoto), Pastor Valerio Casilla (Superintendent in Cuzco), the fellowship in La Quebrada and Tarapoto, Cecilia Quispe, (the Bishop's secretary), those that helped with translation, the Directors of the Schools who hosted us and Eliana Abarca (member of the Methodist church in Cuzco) and her husband Willy, who arranged our visit to Machu Picchu.*

*Rachael Varney, Partnership Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean*