



December 2023
Newsletter: 13

Melissa Newell
Mission Partner with
the Methodist Church



December is an occupational hazard as a Mission Partner – celebrating the Christmas season without longing for home and home traditions is a tricky balance: I find myself longing for a blast of cold air trying to get past my big winter coat, scarf, gloves and boots! Of course, anyone who knows me, knows that, in fact, I hate being cold, and ‘the cold’, so, after a few days, I’d be ready for the warmth again. Nevertheless, the cold, the frost, the short days are as much part of ‘Christmas’ for me as the turkey, carols and presents.

Of course, the Christmas story features many people far from home – Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, Magi undertaking a long journey (following a star no less – that is faith in action!) and at the centre is God coming to dwell on earth in human form, as a baby in a manger. This passage from Philippians 2 reminds me constantly that as I work, Jesus trailblazed the path ahead of me.

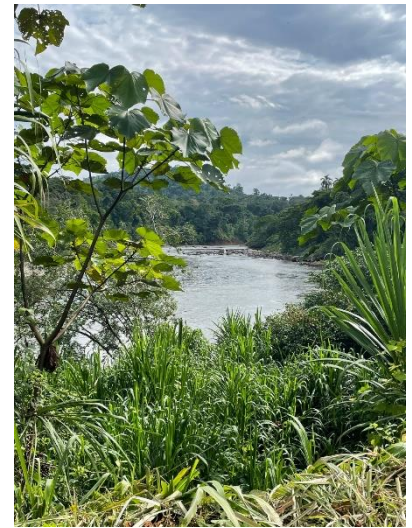
“⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
⁶Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

Last Sunday (17th December) was our Christmas service in church. The music group played a mixture of Christmas related songs and praise songs. Afterwards, various groups and ensembles presented. The children from Ongota sang a medley and a small group from Shiripuno performed a dance. We also had two English songs, one sang by the younger children and one by the teenagers and adults. It turns out Christmas carols in English, even those meant for children, are full of difficult or antiquated language – so we settled on a slightly different version of *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* (with no figgy pudding or kin) and *The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy* (primarily chosen because of how many lines are repeated, and its easiness to understand). It was no small feat for these two groups to stand up at the front and sing in English to over 100 people, and I was very proud of them.

Afterwards, we served ‘arroz relleno’ – a favourite rice dish with chicken, sausage, vegetables and soy sauce. It’s something we make quite a lot on Wednesdays for the lunches we serve, so I volunteered to help cook it before church started. The only catch – church started at 8.30am, and cooking lunch for 150 people is no small order – I was in church at 5.30am chopping vegetables.

A tradition in Ecuador at Christmas time is to give out bags of sweets – basically every Christmas related event in December it is more or less guaranteed that there will be bags of sweets at the end. Our service was no exception, and 150 bags of sweets were given out to all. It was also wonderful to be able to welcome students and parents who don’t attend any church and to share the good news of Christ with them.

For me personally, this was a very special service, as for the first time, it combined every different aspect of my work – the groups from Ongota and Shiripuno, the English classes, playing in the music group, the Misahualli church and serving lunch to large numbers of people. Even though it was not the intention, it allowed me to reflect and give thanks for all the work carried out in in the past year, and the fruits of it, in one service.



Prayer points

2023 was, all in all, an eventful year: moving to Misahualli, a month in the UK in May time - it has been filled with ups and downs, but on the whole, I am grateful for having seen God work in this small community, and what I've been able to do as part of a team in the church life and ministry here. Looking ahead to 2024, there are many points I would value your prayers for:

- 1. My parents' visit in January – please pray for safety in travel, for good health throughout their visit, that they would enjoy their time in Ecuador, seeing the work I have been involved with, spending time together and some sightseeing.*
- 2. My visa renewal – over the next few weeks I will be completing the necessary paperwork to renew my visa, which expires at the end of January. Please pray that this process will be smooth, and of course that the application is granted.*
- 3. 2024! As you will be aware, there are changes ahead in the Methodist Church for Lay Mission. While a path seems to be becoming clearer, I very much value your prayers over the next year through all the transitions (whatever they end up looking like), that God's will will be made clear and that it will all happen according to his plan and his timing. And also patience and wisdom for me as I wait on His timing!*
- 4. I am part of the organising committee for a national conference for worship leaders in April, with zoom events in the lead up to it in February and March. This has already had a lot of work put into it, as we will be joined by some worship leaders from USA, and I am one of the few people organising who speaks both Spanish and English, so I have been needed at most of the planning meetings so far.*

I leave you with another prayer written for the Methodist Church in Britain's prayer handbook, on its theme of Hidden Treasures and 'praying with all creation'. Somehow, I'm on the 1st day of each month. As New Year approaches, I invite you to join with many others who will also be praying for Ecuador on 1st January (and the 1st of every month).

Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year

Melissa



Day 1

PRAYING WITH ALL CREATION

God, we thank you for the incredible splendour of nature represented in Ecuador, a small nation, yet one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet – from the treasures yet undiscovered by humans but created by you in the Amazon Rainforest, to the visibly majestic volcanoes high in the Andes Mountains, sweeping past waterfalls on the twisting road to the Pacific Ocean and heading out to the Galapagos Islands. Help us, the Church, individuals, businesses, corporations and governments to seek these 'hidden treasures', not simply as riches to exploit, but as the life-giving wellspring of this planet of which you have made us stewards, and to discover you in them, seeing them as examples of your handiwork, creativity and love. Amen.

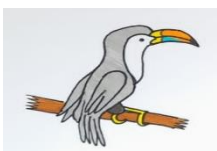
Melissa Newell, mission partner, Ecuador



Looking at the sunrise emerging over the sea we are reminded of all the hidden treasure given to us by God. Photo: Aileen Fox



**IRISH METHODIST
WORLD MISSION
PARTNERSHIP**



Some photo highlights from December:



Having fun in English class



Above and below: Presentations at Christmas service



Ready for the Christmas service



Snacks in Shiripuno



Getting our own lunch after serving the community lunch

