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Newsletter: 7

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Just as I was sending out my previous newsletter at the beginning of November, Santo Domingo was placed into a 'state of exception' due to an increase in violence and crime, and a spate of attacks in the city over the course of three days. This meant there was a curfew, initially of 9pm, and a stronger police and military presence on the streets and doing checks. Thankfully, things calmed down fairly quickly, and the state of exception has now ended. These attacks coincided with a national holiday for 'Day of the Dead' and 'All Saints' Day', when people traditionally visit the graves of loved ones, and enjoy a traditional drink called 'Colada Morada' (a sweet berry juice thickened with flour) and eat 'guaguas de pan' (a sweet bread decorated to look like a child). I had ample of both, and they are very good, but very sweet – best enjoyed in small quantities!



Then it was time for the rollercoaster of the World Cup, which started on a high, as Ecuador became the first country to ever defeat the host nation in their opening match, then a draw with the Netherlands, and finally a shattering defeat to Senegal, which saw Ecuador eliminated at the group stage.

English class and discipleship in *El Esfuerzo*

Another update from the English class in the village 'El Esfuerzo': the programme was developed to also include a short Bible lesson and a snack each week.

Initially, the plan was to finish in November, but it was extended to include December as well. This week, we celebrated the end of the

English course, which has been running since the beginning of August, with a Christmas celebration and presentation. I'm so thankful to God for these teenagers and their attendance each week (pictured right), and Nancy, who helped me out each week (pictured left, receiving a gift).



Sunday School Workshop

On the first Saturday in December, there was a training event for Sunday School teachers. I gave one of the workshops on 'Christmas music and carols'. These are not particularly well-known in Ecuador, so it was a mixture of the history of carols, carols in Methodism and Charles' Wesley's contribution (in the form of *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing* and *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*), and carols and songs which can be used with children.



Demonstrating actions for a song

Andes Region Youth Event: The first weekend in December saw a second regional youth event held, this time in the mountain region of Ecuador (you may recall the first was held in July in the coastal region). It is a lot cooler in the Andes, which was a nice reminder of home. The scenery was also spectacular, and the indigenous culture is still strong in this region. We continued on the theme of 1 Timothy 4v12, and talked about what it meant to be a 'friend of God' (James 2v23). In the afternoon, we had a boat trip on San Pablo lake in the shadow of an extinct volcano – beautiful but very cold! On the Sunday, I attended a service in another local Methodist Church and enjoyed meeting the young people there too.



Other activities have continued in November and December, including the Ladies' prayer meeting on a Thursday, English classes in El Carmen and Santo Domingo and church plant services on a Saturday

And finally... Christmas in Ecuador

The question I'm sure you all want to know – what is Christmas like in Ecuador? From what I've seen so far, I would say – very different! As in many Spanish-speaking countries, families here gather for their main Christmas dinner on the evening of 24th December – celebrations will generally continue until late that night, or early on 25th December, and then Christmas Day itself is much quieter. Present-giving here is not a strong tradition, although it is typical to give gift hampers, and children will generally receive a few presents, and many bags of sweets.



Saturday English Class receiving their Christmas bag of sweets

Prayer points

- For a blessed Christmas, and rest in the week between Christmas and New Year
- For God's protection, and shelter, in daily life, travel and health
- For fellow mission workers from UK who work in Santo Domingo with other organisations, for Grace, a Global Mission Fellow with the Methodist Church from the Philippines, who is currently learning Spanish in Quito, and other missionaries working with the Methodist Church - that we would be a support to each other in our work.
- That I would know God's guidance and leading as I continue to develop my role here
- Planning of future youth events, building on the events held in 2022



Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas! ¡Feliz Navidad!

See you all in 2023,

Melissa

