

Link Letter No. 9 February 2016

Dear friends and supporters,

Happy New Year to you! I know – having already attended a funeral this year – that we are not all always happy at the same time. Therefore, I pray that we all feel God's love in our lives whatever our circumstances.

In my last letter I mentioned how difficult it must be for local people to invest time in building relationships with missionaries and volunteers, only for them to disappear back to their own countries. Over the past two-three months, Petita and I have become good friends, which will make leaving Ecuador in April a bit more difficult. However, she does have a computer so we should be able to keep in touch.

The Life Skills Programme is really going well even though, or perhaps because, the group has not grown in size. The young people are learning and wanting to learn, which has been very encouraging. We have been continuing to make things to sell (including over 300 handmade



Jostyn receiving his Olympic medal



Sharon Wilcox CMS mission partner Ecuador

Sharon Wilcox is a CMS mission partner working and living in Ecuador. She is working with children and adults with severe learning and physical disabilities, in a culture where disability still carries a high level of stigma.

Christmas cards!) and learning how to keep a home well looked after. Most recently, we have been trying to remember important information – home addresses, telephone numbers etc – which is proving a real challenge.

The Santo Domingo heats of the Special Olympics were held on 7-8 November. Only one of our young people attended, but it was the first time for him and he was very pleased to come second in his

race (behind one of the teenagers from the Foundation's school). This year the national event is being held in Santo Domingo in August, while I am in England.

Wednesday 25 November was International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Foundation held a workshop for all who come to the various women's projects. As well as 30 minutes of Bailoterapia (aerobics!), which in the humidity here is no mean achievement, there were talks and the opportunity for various groups to exhibit and sell the crafts and clothing that they have been making. We were also able to have a table for our items too. On 14 November we had an open evening, where we shared what we have been doing with 30 friends and associates of the Church and the Foundation. We raised \$200 as well as increasing awareness of the programme. The week before Christmas, Petita and I ran a stall at the Santo Domingo Christmas Fayre in the local community centre. We did just a day but again were able to raise awareness.

Just before Christmas I began thinking about coming home and what that might look like. What does God have for me to do now I have finished my work here? I could not begin to get a clear picture. Then Petita said: "I will need you to come back here to help me". I laughed as I had already said that I don't think that is what God wants, and that she will be able to manage things by herself. Well, she obviously knew more than me – I could not let go of the thought of coming back.



At the women's workshop in November



Petita at the Santo Domingo Christmas fayre

So I decided that I needed to spend some time with the Lord, so took myself away for a weekend.

Following this I could begin to see that just maybe, I should come back in October for a three-month period, to observe and offer help and advice to Petita. And also, in May there will be three-four school leavers who will be offered a place with the programme; if this happens, Petita will be faced with working with a group of people with learning disabilities and she does



Jostyn and Washington learning to clean windows

not have any experience and so would welcome any assistance. I then emailed Bishop Henry Scriven at CMS, the mission director for Latin America, to share my thoughts, and he agreed that it sounded viable and suggested that I should speak to Luz Celly, the Director of the Foundation, to see whether she felt it right for me to stay on. When I spoke to her briefly, she was delighted with the idea but we agreed to wait and pray about it while she was

away in Columbia. When she returns at the end of January, she will sit down and work out who will be joining the programme in May and can take my proposal further.

However, just two days before Christmas, Luz announced at our staff meal to everyone that I would be returning in October for three years! I was not able to speak to her so until the end of January, I don't know if she was joking or not!

Whatever happens, I intend to be in the UK for six months, so that I have time to see family and friends who I have not seen for three years and to visit as many of my supporters as possible. I will also spend time resting and discerning God's plans for me. However, I do feel that I will be seeing Ecuador again fairly soon, as long as people are happy to continue to walk alongside me on this journey, supporting me both financially and in prayer. I feel very humbled that God has used me to bring hope to a group of young people here in Santo Domingo, and have really enjoyed being part of a new venture for the Foundation.

During my initial talk with Bishop Henry at CMS, we discussed the possibility of taking my project/ knowledge to Peru and Chile if I do



Petita and Pastor Rodrigo taking up the challenge at the open evening

not return to Ecuador for three years. So another three years in South America is looking possible wherever I might end up.

These are the things for which I would value your prayers and your input when we meet through the summer (summer – long evenings of daylight!).

Please give thanks:

- That God has given me the opportunity to make a difference.
- That he has allowed friendships to develop, not only with Petita but with other missionaries.
- That the young people are learning and having fun.
- For God's presence with me throughout the last three years, making all that has happened possible.

Please pray:

- For the discussions in February/March to decide which young people will come to the Life Skills programme, especially as some of them may not have reached the school leaving age.
- That Petita will become confident in her ability to lead the group, and enjoy the challenge.
- That I will finish my time here well, and that when I return to the UK the Lord will unwrap more of what he has planned for me.
- That reverse culture shock will not be too painful for me.

Looking forward to meeting up with you and thank you for your continued support,

Blessings

Sharon

PS. Did you know that you can now receive link letters by email, sent as a PDF? If you would like to receive them this way and help CMS save money, please send an email to links@cms-uk.org

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Church Mission Society

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