

# Sharon Wilcox

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*The call in action*

Dear friends,

Happy New Year to you all. I hope you were able to spend some time with family and friends over Christmas and New Year. I pray we will all have a happy and blessed 2022.

As ever, a new year finds many of us reflecting on the past year. I look back at a year of many changes and challenges for me personally, as well as for the church here in Santo Domingo. Not least the effect of having COVID-19 and living through another year of the pandemic.

I have seen my role here change and have enjoyed the challenges the Lord has put in my path.

The Orchid Project started back in person on 11 October. We were immediately told that the church had indeed been sold and we had until Christmas to find somewhere else. This also meant that the church members did not want to spend money on necessary repairs, so we found ourselves without cooking facilities and dodging rainwater in the sanctuary. They had a Venezuelan family living in the church for a few months while it was closed. When they left, sadly, they decided to take quite a lot of our cooking utensils with them. Thankfully the Lord has provided a new church, Sublime Gracia, for us on the outskirts of Santo Domingo, with plenty of outdoor space to play in and to grow things. There is also an open-air temple and two classrooms. Transport issues we thought we would have, have been resolved.

In November, The First Baptist Church commissioned its first missionaries, who have gone to serve in the Amazon in the northeast of Ecuador, about eight hours' drive from Santo Domingo. The Orchid Project also said goodbye to Marlon, as he and his family have moved back to Quito so that his sister can attend university in person. At the time of writing this, Marlon has not found anything meaningful to do to fill his days, highlighting the need for me to do the training I had planned to do two years ago in Quito. Please pray that that door will open again later in 2022.

The project with the Venezuelans has continued in the Baptist church. Also, my new Venezuelan neighbours asked me to help them feed people arriving at the bus terminal with young children. So we went on a Saturday evening and fed 48 people, and told them about the church being open for them on Saturday mornings.

At the end of November the organiser of the Sunday School for the older generation and I went for a coffee. She seemed very pleased that



**Name:** Sharon Wilcox

**Location:** Ecuador

**My call:** To show God's love in action to people with learning disabilities.

**My role:** To teach life skills that enable people to become independent, valued members of their community.



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*At Sublime Gracia church*

I had invited her. It transpired that while she was recovering from COVID-19 a couple of weeks earlier, she had been praying that God would help her find time to meet with me in person so she could ask me if I would join the team of people teaching the classes on Sundays. I could hardly say no once she had explained. So, with very much a new challenge, I taught my first class in December. I have only committed to do it until March, as I now hope to be in the UK from March to the end of July. Flights are booked, but as we know, the situation with the pandemic means all can change at short notice.

In December we were invited to a new local mission called Live by Faith set up by my missionary friends Roberto (Ecuadorian) and Maria (Puerto Rican). They had been to visit the Orchid and had fallen in love with the members of the group. They gave us the opportunity to show and sell some of the items we had made.

On Christmas Eve, when Ecuadorians celebrate Christmas, I had the privilege of joining Roberto, Maria and members of the mission, to give out meals to those living on the streets and others who were struggling with health and addiction problems. We gave out 146 meals and offered to pray with each person. I believe only two people declined the offer of a prayer. It was a truly humbling and yet uplifting experience. I then cooked a traditional British Christmas lunch on the 25<sup>th</sup> for myself and three other English-speaking missionaries.

Please pray that I will be able to find a volunteer to work with Gloria from Monday to Wednesday every week while I am away. I have a new volunteer, Stela, who is doing Thursdays, and Marcela, who does Fridays. Although we may need someone else for Thursdays, as Stela's family situation has recently changed and she's having to look for work. The group will have two months' holiday (along with the schools in Santo Domingo) in March and April, so the volunteers are needed from 3 May onwards.

We have a new student this year, and Washington has returned, so now there are seven in the group. Eli and Jostyn have chosen to stay at home doing very little, instead of re-joining the group. Another new person has not yet shown up.

This year has also seen the Ecuador government introduce mandatory COVID vaccines, and we now have to show our vaccine certificate in order to enter any public buildings, including churches. This has caused some anger in the church as some of our deacons and other members had chosen not to be vaccinated, and cannot now attend services or midweek groups. Please pray for peace and understanding on both sides of the debate. The situation is due to be reviewed at regular intervals.

I am very much looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible this spring/summer.

With every blessing,

Sharon



*Photos from top to bottom: At work in our new home; commissioning missionaries; visit to Live by Faith; praying on the streets at Christmas*

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