



Sharon Wilcox

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Location: Ecuador



What I do: Working with people with learning disabilities, teaching them life skills and seeking to enable them to become independent.

Dear friends,

I pray that you have enjoyed the first few months of 2023. For me it has been a busy few months.

Just before the end of our year was Carnival (Shrove Tuesday), when everyone celebrates by soaking people with water, eggs or shaving foam. There is also a parade which starts from the bottom of my street.

The Orchid Project finished the year well at the end of February, with a meal including families and volunteers. The youngsters were then on holiday until Easter Monday. One of them, Paul, even stayed at his aunt's, at the beach, until the end of April in order to help her in her restaurant. He dreams of being a chef one day.

I had arranged to make a quick visit back to the UK to celebrate Mother's Day and my mum's 90th birthday in March. I am so glad that I did, as she appeared to enjoy both days. It was good to visit her with both of my siblings, and to see that she appears to be ok (she has dementia).

I was back in Ecuador in time to celebrate Easter. On Good Friday Pastor William and others guided us through the last seven sayings of Jesus, which lasted about three hours. The service was held in the church's new auditorium. The Sunday service didn't include as much about the resurrection of Jesus as I would have liked, so I was glad that I was able to talk about it with the older folk as I led their Sunday school class that day. The week before I flew home, I spent a weekend at the church in Quito that is interested in starting an Orchid Project there. I met with the parents of 14 families in the church who have a child with learning disabilities. Seven of those children are over the age of 16, so would be able to attend the project. I was able to offer some advice and the parents shared some of the problems that they have. They soon realised that they all had similar stories and were able to advise each other. We agreed to set up a WhatsApp group going forward, for help and advice.

On the Sunday morning I spoke at each of their three church services, explaining the plan and asking for volunteers. People came forward after each service offering to help. By lunchtime I had a list of 41 volunteers (including a barber, a chef and a sports trainer)! I am aware that some of the volunteers will drop out, but have a meeting planned for the middle of May to work out who will be involved and what they will be teaching. From there we will arrange a week when I will do some training with them, including some time with the youngsters who will be part of the project.



Carnival 2023

Support Sharon Wilcox:
churchmissionsociety.org/wilcox

**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



I had been unaware, initially, that my former student Marlon lives about five minutes' drive from the church. This means that he will also be able to go along. He is very excited as he has had nothing much to do for the last 18 months since the family returned to live in Quito. I love the way God provides the unexpected. He and his family came along to the church on that Sunday, and Marlon told me he was planning to get baptised, after doing some baptism classes at his church. On Saturday 29 April, his mum sent me some photos of his baptism. We very seldom know what effect we have when we share the gospel with someone. I would like to think that being part of the Orchid Project, listening to God's word every day, played a part in the process.

When we restarted classes after Easter, Gloria, my volunteer, gave me notice that she was leaving, after six years. Her mother passed

away in January, and her father had been having some health issues and cannot be left on his own for very long. So sadly, she left us at the end of April, though she has kindly offered to accompany the group, for now, on Mondays when they go to the hotel, as it is only for a couple of hours. It was a difficult decision for her to make. She had hoped that some of her seven siblings would have offered to help their dad. The decision means that Camila has had to leave too, as she has no way of getting to the project without Gloria. Please pray that Camila can find somewhere to occupy her days and continue to learn.

Marcela, who volunteers on Fridays, has been having a lot of physical and mental health issues, so I have asked her to take six months to a year off, and then decide if she wants to come back. She says she does want to return. Pray that she takes the time she needs and that she will truly see God working in her life in the months ahead.

As I am writing this, I have four potential new volunteers. Two have already started on Thursday and Friday (bringing new skills), and two others still need to visit the project before making their decision. Please pray for them, the youngsters as they get to know each other and for me as I "train on the job".

As I said, it has been a busy start to the year.

Thank you for joining with me in my journey. I really appreciate all you do for me.

Every blessing,

Sharon



Photos from top to bottom: End of year celebration; Mum's 90th; Baptist church Good Friday; Marlon's baptism



Going further with Church Mission Society

Jesus never gives up. Neither should we. We live in a fractured, hurting world. It can be tempting to give up: on hope, on people, on the idea that things can ever change. Yet, Jesus invites us to follow him on a journey to the edges. Find out more at churchmissionsociety.org/nevergiveup

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