



# Anna Sims

Link Letter no. 29 | April 2024



**Location:** Peru



**What I do:** Supporting female, English-speaking inmates and ex-offenders in Lima through prison ministry Walking in Liberty.

Dear friends,

2024 started in a very precious and relaxed manner in Manchester watching a film with my brother-in-law (my sister had already gone to bed), pausing it at midnight for me to look out of the window at the fireworks at the end of the road. The following day, we all went for a New Year's Day walk along a canal and for a pub lunch. I was so thankful to be able to spend some time with family and thoroughly enjoyed the cold wet weather and being able to wear knitwear.



*New Year's Day walk with my sister*

Arriving back in Lima in January was a shock to the senses as the heatwave continued with some of the hottest temperatures on record for a number of years. In my absence, Mary had

been busy planning a retreat for a group of ex-offenders and their children, who are all established in Peru and don't plan to return to their passport countries. The retreat team was made up of a number of people who had been involved in prison ministry over the years as well as some new helpers. There were seven nationalities represented overall. We had three days in a lovely retreat centre in Cieneguilla on the outskirts of Lima and there were daily times of prayer and worship, taught sessions, free time with games and use of an outside pool, a bonfire and, on the final day, a short "take it to the cross" service and communion. It was a lovely time and great to see everyone pull together, have some time out of their daily routines and the opportunity to intentionally spend a longer time with God.

The celebratory atmosphere continued the following weekend as one of the boys (aged nine) was baptised at his church. We were all able to be there to support him and share in the joy and he gave a clear and succinct testimony as to why he had asked to be baptised: "I love Jesus."

Mary and I had arrived at the retreat quite sad, as one of our inmates from Santa Monica had died the day before. She had been hospitalised the previous week with a severe infection and thankfully, we had got in to see her and take her some items (water, gown, toiletries etc). We had both been able to speak to her and pray with her. Mary had sung to her and I had reassured her that she was not alone and that Jesus loved her, "and I love Jesus" had been her response. I had spoken to the doctor, who had told me she was improving and they were going to reduce her oxygen. The following day, Mary returned and she was unresponsive. Two days later we received the news from prison officials that she had died. She was not in contact with any family and

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



we still do not know what she died from or what happened to her body, as that was the responsibility of the prison service and her embassy. Understandably, the rest of the women in our Bible study were distraught and shocked. We applied for special permission to visit them, to have some time together for a thanksgiving and memorial activity, but our request was denied.

Normally, we are back in Santa Monica on our weekly visits from the beginning of March (at the start of the term after the long summer holidays), but at the time of publication (mid-April), our passes have still not been renewed and we have no news of what is happening.

I was back visiting the same hospital again a month later. This time alone, as Mary was in Canada on her home assignment. One of our pregnant ex-offenders went in for a routine check-up and ended up having an emergency C-section. She was discharged four days

later, but her son, born at 32 weeks, remains in an incubator on an ICU ward. There are many similarities between the Peruvian prison system and state hospitals. And the irony was not lost on me, that although I wasn't able to visit Santa Monica, I was still queuing to see a foreigner, clutching a bag containing toilet paper, drinking water and items that were needed so she was allowed to visit her baby (disposable cap, gown, mask and slippers) whom she hadn't seen since the surgery. I had my bag searched, had to get into further queues and at one point had an argument with a security guard, as I was trying to get a catheter up to the baby that I was told he urgently needed. This frustration lasted for three days until he had his catheter. Without a visitor, the patients are expected to manage this themselves, including buying any equipment that is needed for their treatments (gloves, syringes, masks etc) and have no access to "street clothes" until their bill is paid and they are discharged. So, patients have to wander from department to department sorting out the paperwork in hospital gowns. I find the whole system heart-breaking, but it is the reality for the majority of Peruvians.

Thankfully, we have a God that watches over foreigners (Psalm 146:9) and the members of this woman's church (where her eldest son had been baptised a couple of weeks before) are stepping up to help the family with childcare and as well as other needs. It's great to see the local church family rallying around.

Thanks as always for your ongoing support,  
Anna x



*Photos from top to bottom: Baptism; visiting Maria Auxiliadora hospital with Mary; forgiveness workshop at retreat; praying with one of the retreatants*



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