Dear Friends,

Once again, my plans for the evening have changed with relatively little warning: the heat wave we'd been experiencing for the last several days broke furiously this afternoon with a rainstorm accompanied by ferocious winds, thunder and lightning. Promptly the lights went out and haven't yet returned (it's now five hours later). Numerous properties have been damaged and trees felled. Tonight's Bible study has been cancelled, so it's time to write the first newsletter of the year whilst the laptop battery holds out.

Christmas and New Year passed merrily here, as hoped and anticipated, shared with my Peruvian brothers and sisters, as well as other Christian expatriates in Nauta, my BMS colleagues Dave and Michele and their children from Iquitos and the BMS Action Team, Jacob, Erin and Sophie. There aren't really any non-Catholic Christmas traditions that are observed in Nauta, so no carol singing, or nativity plays were enjoyed. However, we did delight in a bit of salsa dancing and archery (not simultaneously). Thank-you also to everyone who sent Christmas cards and packages, which helped extend the festive feeling for quite some time after the 25th, thanks to the irregular frequency of the Peruvian mail service between Lima and Iquitos and my ability to get to the Post Office in Iquitos.

Finally getting back to work, 2020 has brought some important changes:

Personnel – Living in Nauta when you're young, ambitious and Peruvian can present real challenges to one's aspirations for the future. After a number of conversations with the Centre's administrators, Paolo and Tessy (pictured below), it was decided that they would move on from their current roles with us at the end of December. Nevertheless, we're very pleased to have been able to retain Paolo in a part-time accounting and administrative support role.

Recruiting for the Centre's coordinator role (Paolo's old job), has been an interesting process but we believe we've found a local believer, Bettsy, who is right for the role and who will start officially on the 3rd of Feb.

We also have a completely new role within the team, the NIMTC Teaching and Outreach Coordinator. We're incredibly grateful to the Lord for Felix, a young Nautino believer recently returned from full-time mission work in Brazil, who will be taking on this role from the end of January.

Projects – the new cycle of the Integral Mission Pastors Training Program began this month (January) with a force we'd not seen in a couple of years. We had 22 students, including teenagers and adults, up from an average of five from the last cycle!

I confess that I had been concerned that as a team we had not managed to make the time to do the reconnaissarce trips to new villages that we had planned for October and November 2019. The purpose of these trips was to find new students.
We were lacking time due to a number of other river trips that we were making, having been invited by ex-students to their church anniversaries, weddings and a couple of Christmas ‘chocolatadas’.

In late December, one of these ex-students asked me about the dates of the training in January because he had a couple of young leaders in his church that he wanted to encourage. This ex-student, Pr. Abram, ended up bringing 16 of the 22 new students. The other ex-student, Pr. Humberto, has now asked us to facilitate three weekend training events this year in his village as part of his own initiative to reach out to 25 villages in the area on the River Nanay – Iquitos.

My internet/mobile network hovered between No Service and 3G for some reason all that day, but I was delighted with the ‘pinging’ of new messages arriving every time it reconnected! My main birthday gift arrives later in the year when my parents visit me in May – bringing my ‘cello (and themselves, of course).

In the words of a good friend, the Lord has confirmed that he’s quite OK with what we’re able to do in the time we have!

Meanwhile, I celebrated my birthday on the 28 January, which was a relatively quiet but sweet affair with good friends and cake. Thank you for all the birthday messages via the different avenues of social media.

Please remember Bettsy and Felix in your prayers as they settle into their new roles.

Do continue to pray for Paolo, as he continues with us but juggles life between Nauta and Iquitos (60 miles apart), and Tessy, as she settles back into work and life with their children in Iquitos. We’re incredibly grateful for the two years they gave to the Training Centre and the impact they were able to make on the local community through the ministry during that time.

As always, your continued support and prayers are invaluable for the the work here. Thank you!

Love Laura