

PRIVILEGED TO SERVE

Eighteen months ago, all I knew about Peru was that it was in South America and home to an ancient city well-known for its incredible archaeology. What I have encountered since then has, however, been far more than fascinating facts about Incas or a tourist's guide to the jungle; I've had the privilege of witnessing and working alongside the church in Iquitos.

My main intention in going to UFM missionaries David and Bertha Barnes for 6 months was to tutor their 14-year old son, Esteban and so free up David and Bertha to carry out their ministries in Iquitos, a city of about 400,000 in the northeast of Peru, surrounded by rivers and jungle, and ranging between suffocating heat and hammering rain – not quite what I was used to at home in Cardiff!

David's ministry is primarily to teach Theology at the "Instituto Biblico Bautista Iquitos" (IBBI). He's also serving as the interim Director of IBBI, amongst countless other duties that come with the missionary calling. Bertha's role of late has been particularly concentrated at the Policlínico, a Scripture Union clinic and children's centre, where she works with the most deprived and needy people of the Belen area, translating for visiting doctors in the clinic and helping children at the afternoon homework club.

Tutoring Esteban was generally straightforward as he is an exceptionally smart young man; truth be told, there were times when I had to admit to him being smarter than me!

Teaching English at IBBI was my second purpose in Iquitos and this was very different to tutoring Esteban. When David asked if I would teach and I, in my enthusiasm said yes, I had no real idea what I was letting myself in for. Most of the students were older than me, there were no materials to work from and there was I, originally from the depths of South London where we tend to forget what our "t's" and "h's" sound like, faced with the task of teaching Spanish-speaking Peruvians to speak English. It's hard to imagine now that I ever dreaded taking the first lesson as any nerves I'd felt vanished the moment I stood at the blackboard with what was

only a God-given confidence – an answer to many prayers.

Iquitos is a place of immense spiritual and material need; the town centre is bursting with beggars and peddlers, children and adults alike. AIDS is widespread but not cautioned against, and the churches are struggling and not well taught. The issues within the church are varied and deep-rooted, and at times it seems impossible to know where to start. It's a place that causes you to humbly realise the rich Christian heritage we have in the UK and thank God for his gracious provision of godly, well-taught men to preach and teach his Word.



Peru is the sort of country that attracts visitors looking for "something different" from mundane lives. I didn't go to Peru looking for that, but what I found here was my Saviour in new and deeper ways. Although there are numerous issues in the Iquitos church, thank God that Christ will build his church; Satan may roar and rage but the church will conquer with Christ as the Head of it. As I leave Peru I will be taking many incredible memories, but above all I hope to abide by Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5v.25 with regards to my friends and Christian family here – "Brothers, pray for us." ■

Hannah Woolley

