

WELCOME TO THE SPRING 2025 EDITION OF SPOTLIGHT ON SPAIN

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JOANNA JOHNSON – A VOLUNTEER'S EXPERIENCE

My first trip to Valdepeñas was in the summer of 2018. I was a university student and had been searching online for short-term evangelistic mission opportunities, which led me to the website for the 'Misión Evangélica Española'. Following an email of enquiry, Jacky Cogman got in touch to make me aware of a need for helpers for some of the Holiday Bible Clubs that were being put on by churches in and around the Castilla-La Mancha region.

I remember the mixed sentiment of nervous excitement in the weeks leading up to the holiday clubs at the end of June. I had done similar voluntary work in Spain before, but alongside a mainly British team, so the idea of being involved alongside native speakers had me a little bit apprehensive as to how my A Level Spanish skills would hold up!



Holiday Bible Club helpers with David, Jacky, Pepe and Lidia 2018. Joanna is the fourth person on the left.

This wasn't helped by the cancellation of my flight shortly after it had been due to depart from Manchester airport. After train delays down to London Stansted, and further delays on the plane after boarding, I believe I ended up arriving in Madrid just before midnight – 14 hours later than my initial 10 a.m. ETA which had been planned in with David and Jacky! They ended up waiting around all day to eventually accompany me on the 2.5-hour drive down to Valdepeñas and I remember feeling mortified that I had kept complete strangers waiting for so long. I soon realised however that the worrying had been completely unnecessary as I was warmly and kindly received not only by David and Jacky, but also by the other helping volunteers, and the Valero family who looked after us all so well during our stay in Monescillo.

On reflection, the incredible hospitality and generosity shown by many of the individuals from the various churches linked to the mission, is something that has left a lasting impression and contributed towards making time spent volunteering with the mission so fulfilling and blessed over the years. In spite of my somewhat shaky Spanish, and initial nerves and sense of inadequacy, that first week spent helping with the outreach in Santa Cruz and Manzanares was such an immense privilege, as together, visiting volunteers and church members alike, we were granted the opportunity to share God's message of love with so many local children from non-Christian family backgrounds.

The days were busy, with those of us staying in Monescillo attending one holiday club in the morning, before returning to the mission house for delicious lunches prepared by Pepe and Lidia and heading out for a second club which often ran quite late into the evening. But we certainly experienced the truths of Isaiah 41:10, finding God to be our strength, help and the One who upheld us in our weak and ordinary efforts to make Him known amongst the children and families we were seeking to serve.

After returning to Valdepeñas to help with the holiday clubs at Santa Cruz, Moral and Manzanares in 2019 and 2022 (once outreach became possible again after the coronavirus pandemic), I was delighted when an opportunity arose to join a team who were putting on a bilingual camp for primary-aged children

at Monescillo in the summer of 2023. There is something very unique about the way these Christian camps allow for special bonds to be formed with the campers in such a short space of time, with friendships often naturally resulting in some of the best and easiest gospel opportunities in small group and 1-to-1 settings. And so, in spite of the intense nature of being constantly surrounded by the noise and mayhem of Spanish-speaking 7 to 12 year-olds, I was more than happy to return again in summer 2024 to assist with the latest bilingual camp, where I had the privilege of leading the English workshops and memory verses and telling my first Bible story in Spanish!



Bilingual Camp 2024. Joanna is the person on the far right of the back row. She's wearing a pink t-shirt.

Although my own mission visits have all taken place when I've been able to take advantage of some downtime in the summer, I am all too mindful of the evangelistic work that goes on in the churches and mission centre throughout the year, and it has been a blessing to be able to uphold those faithful and vital labours of my fellow brothers and sisters in prayer, as they seek to build on and carry forward the efforts of the summer outreach in the weeks and months between.

In spite of the geographical distance, those deep relationships that have developed over the years allow me to feel a close connection to the work that is taking place even now, and the churches I have visited and worked alongside hold a special place in my heart.

I really don't know who might be reading this, or what your personal situation might be, but let me finish by reminding us all (and myself especially!) that it won't be the hours invested for the furtherance of the gospel that we regret when we stand before the Lord at the end of our time on Earth, but the hours we spend on the things that won't count for eternity.

And whether at home, or abroad, each one of us finds ourselves surrounded by white harvest fields entrapped by deep realms of darkness, that God in His wisdom and grace can use us to reap if we willingly offer ourselves to be used in endeavours for the furtherance of His kingdom.

NEWS FROM MORAL DE CALATRAVA

Concern is often expressed for the elderly and sick amongst the members of the congregation. There has been encouragement, however, in that several newer members of the congregation are attending discipleship classes.

Mariana has been continuing to work with 10 to 12 children in the Kidsclub and has more opportunities to reach out to other children as she teaches them English. The Holiday Bible Club was well attended last summer. Prayer is asked that the seed sown amongst the children would bear fruit.

SEFOVAN Bible training

Nine students registered for the Bible training course, meeting in the Mission House. José Luis was asked to have more involvement in teaching on the course as he has completed training to be a tutor. This involves travelling quite some distances, including the Canary Islands, to teach for the day.



SEFOVAN training in Monescillo Mission House

As a result of José Luis' increased involvement in SEFOVAN, he applied and has been accepted by the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Fort Worth, Texas) to study for a Master's degree in Theological Studies. The courses are online and in Spanish.

Family matters

On January 1st, Noemí's father went to be with the Lord. José Luis and Noemí were staying with the family in Galicia at the time and so were with him when he died. Natanael and Eric were able to travel north to attend their grandfather's funeral. The two brothers continue to need prayer for their spiritual lives, that the Lord would open their hearts so that they acknowledge Him as their Saviour.

Noemí stayed in Galicia to help her mother with arrangements and to make preparations for her to be able to come to live with the family in Moral de Calatrava for a while.

NEWS FROM MANZANARES

Due to many people immigrating to Spain at present, especially from Latin American countries, churches are receiving many who profess faith in the Lord; some are true believers, others just nominal evangelicals. Most come without work and many of them cannot work until they have their necessary documents, prompting us to give material help to several families. The church requests prayer for wisdom in dealing with these people, and that those who are not believers would turn to Christ.

Manzanares church members also held a Holiday Bible Club and were involved in the summer evangelistic campaign. Many conversations were had and a great deal of literature given out. People from the three Mission churches and the Valdepeñas church helped during the evangelistic campaign.



Various pastoral issues and initiatives have arisen in the church, these include workshops for those wounded by trauma – the material used is the Bible; eight months into her pregnancy Sofía and Franco discovered that their baby had died.

Discipling continues with Jorge and Gabriela's family.

Five people from the congregation have asked to be baptised; most of them are young people. A premarital course has started for the two couples to be married: Alex and Ester, Enzo and Camila.

Family matters

Prayer is requested for Manolo and Toñy's family. For their daughter, Deborah, who is a school teacher, and her husband, Rubén, who works as an electronics technician, that the Lord would help them as a couple, as parents and in their ministries in the church. They have a young daughter, Eva, who is in the second year of infant school.

Saray, their other daughter, is married to Emi. Saray is out of work at the moment and Emi needs prayer for the theological course he is following.

NEWS FROM SANTA CRUZ DE MUDELA

The Holiday Bible Club in June was held in the local school as many children were expected to attend; and they did! 67 had fun and learnt that God exists

and found evidence of His love and work for the world through Christ Jesus. Pray for the children and their families who heard the gospel message.

Some members were involved in the evangelistic campaign. The final thanksgiving service was held in Santa Cruz de Mudela in the local park. It was a good time of testimony and praise and an opportunity to continue proclaiming the gospel in public.



Paquita went to be with the Lord in July and her farewell service was a time of testimony to her faith and her faithful witness throughout her life amongst us. Pray that Paquita's children would remember what she taught them and turn to the Lord.

Fernando continues his SEFOVAN studies in order to be able to serve more effectively in the church.

Sergio and Chani have weekly Bible studies in Viso del Marqués, a town 25 km from Santa Cruz, with Tainen, her husband Emilio and another couple who live in the town, Manuel and Astrid. Both Tainen and Emilio have become Christians and have requested baptism. Another family, Fernando and his wife Sara, have started to attend the services together with their three children. The Lord has brought great blessing to the church through these families.

A surprising event took place in September. The town council had a programme of guided visits to significant buildings in the town which included the Mission church's building in Glory Street! A children's group visited and then a group of about 50 people were able to listen to the gospel and learn more about the church's activities.

Family matters

At the end of January Sergio's 94-year-old mother went to be with the Lord. Sergio and family travelled to the Canary Islands at very short notice and arrived in time to talk with her and say goodbye.

Jennifer's studies are going quite well. She is having specific professional Sales Assistant training at a school in Ciudad Real. She still goes to her occupational and speech therapists each week.

Sergio and Chani still have no contact with their daughter Eli and her husband, whose hearts are still hardened against the Lord. Their son Pablo and his family need prayer to continue being faithful to the Lord and serving Him in their church.

NEWS FROM MONESCILLO MISSION HOUSE

Last summer the Mission House was able to hold a bilingual children's camp. 11 children enjoyed singing, playing and learning from God's word. The helpers were Joanna (see page 1), Elías (from Peru) and a group of young monitors led by Noemí Valero.

Two activities have been a real blessing: the ladies' meeting and the married couples' workshop. The plan is to continue with these groups which have seen a growth in fellowship and have been a witness to non-believers who attend. The craft workshop continues, with new ladies joining last year.



Ladies' meeting at Monescillo

José has made alterations and improvements to the outside wall of the library. He is grateful for the health and strength given in order to carry out the practical work on the Centre's various buildings.

Family matters

José and Lidia's son, Josué, started music studies in Córdoba last September; he travels home every other weekend. Abigail currently has part-time work but would prefer to work full time. Please pray for both.

UK COUNCIL

After over 30 years of faithful service on the UK Council, Peter and Jenny Thackeray, Jenny serving as Treasurer for much of that time and Peter as Chairman, have retired from their post. Their wisdom and fellowship will be greatly missed.

FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2023

Opening balance at 1 January 2023	£7,614
Income	£147,747
Expenditure	£59,022
Closing balance at 31 Dec 2023	£96,339

The income is mainly due to three legacies totalling £105,885.91 with the remaining £41,861 coming from donations and our gift aid claim on 2022 donations. It is worth noting that without the legacies, we would have suffered a deficit of £17,161 so we are grateful for the year's surplus of £88,725 to allow us to maintain support for the workers in future years. The appeal that was set up in 2023 for the purchase of 30 mattresses was achieved, £2,564 being given for their purchase. This completes and concludes this project for the Mission House and we thank the Lord for His provision through His people.

CONTACT DETAILS



SPANISH GOSPEL MISSION

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