

SIFAT Journal



Sharing God's Love in Practical Ways

April 2008

A Chance to Make a Difference

By Kathy Bryson

International Training Director

Today almost 30,000 children under the age of five will die of mostly preventable causes. More than 70 percent of the planet does not have clean drinking water or sanitation. While statistics can be overwhelming, there are solutions that can change this-- one community at a time!

We have students from 21 countries waiting...hoping...for a chance to come to SIFAT and learn practical skills to help make a difference in their home communities.

During our 10-week Fall Practicum,

students from around the world learn skills such as how to purify water, to grow more food, to raise small animals, to teach adult literacy, to make reading glasses, to prevent malnutrition and promote child survival, to start a small business and much more---all within a context of Christian community development.

Would you help sponsor them for this opportunity?

Consider a \$500 scholarship to invest in training that gives practical solutions for poverty--concrete ways to share God's love to people who are hurting, lacking in basic human needs we take for granted. Invest in training a community leader who then returns to



Practicum graduate Lieu Dea (left) returned to C'ote d'Ivoire, where he has an agricultural training station to help poor farmers rebuild after the civil war.

train many others back home. What a chance to make a difference! Won't you take a share in an international student's training today? Contact brysonk@sifat.org for more info.

SERVANTS
IN FAITH AND
TECHNOLOGY

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Reflection on Deaf Teen Retreat

"What are you standing there for? Come in and find a place to stay" Under the yellow glow cast by a tiki-fire torch, a man spoke to our group in accented Spanish. Sarah, our sign language interpreter and guide, had led our group to the end of a dirt and gravel street. Lining the narrow street was a rough collection of shacks slapped together with salvaged scrap wood, chicken wire and corrugated iron castoffs. "You can't stand there, or else the police will arrest you." Our deaf teens looked at each other, waiting for the sign translation from Sarah. I was a little uncertain to move, but this was part of our learning experience at SIFAT. In deference to our need to communicate in sign language, the SIFAT staff had illuminated the crude street with torch lights atop bamboo poles staked into the ground.

I stepped forward, walking toward the man who spoke to us. He was behind a shack-length counter top that faced the

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Learn & Serve Update

Elementary L&S

On June 29, Learn & Serve (L&S) will open an inaugural session for elementary students entering the fourth through sixth grades. Although we have held retreats for this age group, an entire session of L&S has never been devoted for elementary students.

We are excited about hosting this awesome camping experience and providing a place for them to learn about missions, as well as many different cultures from around the world. The elementary session, which costs \$150 will begin on June 29th and end July 2nd. To learn more about this new opportunity, please visit the elementary page of our L&S site or contact Jamie (waldhourj@sifat.org), our L&S director.

L&S Counselors

This year, eight counselors will lead almost 550 students during the nine weeks of L&S. Greg Clayton, Wes Etheridge, Addison Shock and Leslie Loyd are returning for their second year. Margaret Able, Mike Hopkins, Laura McAllily and Megan Hunter complete our summer staff. Visit our counselor page on the L&S website (www.sifat.org/learnandserve) to see their photos and to learn more about them.

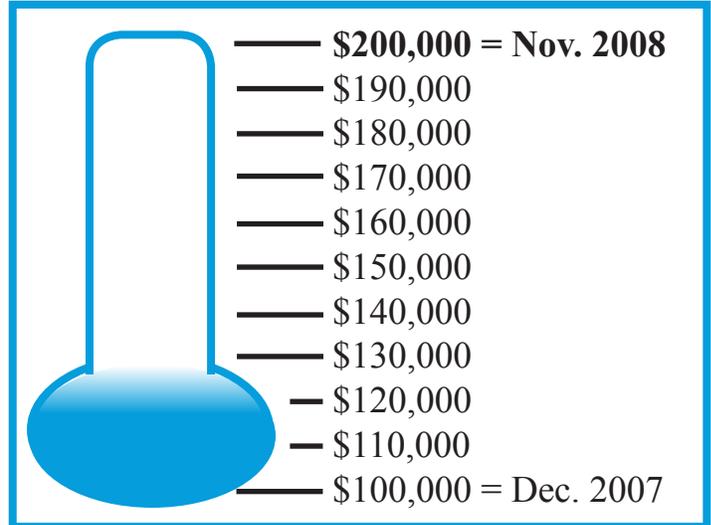
Limited Space Available

Four weeks of L&S are booked to capacity. However, spaces are still available during weeks one, four, six and nine. Interested individuals or groups can contact Jamie (waldhourj@sifat.org) for more information, or you can find instructions and download registration forms on the registration page of our L&S site. L&S begins on Sunday afternoon and ends Friday morning. Each session costs \$250 per person.

www.sifat.org/learnandserve



Sarah Trust Fund Update



To contribute to the Sarah Trust Fund, please write "Sarah Fund" in the memo field of your check.

Upcoming STM Trips

The following teams are serving in Bolivia and Ecuador this spring. Please pray for them as they prepare and travel to share God's love in practical ways.

Ecuador:

May 10-17 Fairhope FUMC (medical team)
May 31-June 6 Taylorville UMC

Bolivia:

May 12-22 Auburn Youth (first bridge team)

Contact Information Spring Cleaning

Each month, SIFAT Journals are returned because of incorrect addresses. Please help us update your information in our database.

If you have recently moved or are planning to move soon, please call or e-mail Marie (lanierm@sifat.org) with your updated information. We don't want to lose contact with you!

Deaf teens

(Continued from page 1)

street. Inside were near-bare shelves with an occasional canned food and small sack of rice. “Do you have any jobs so we can buy some food?” I asked in voice and in sign language. Watching me were Sandy and Nicole, members of my hastily created family for this lesson in slum living. The other adults, Peggy, Stephen and Mary Kay followed along with their “families” too.

“Yes, we have jobs. Take this broken baby carriage to the man down the street. I pay you 100 bolivianos.” As I pushed the stiff wheeled-carriage to its destination, I saw the other families wandering down the street, poking their heads in the low-roofed shacks. Old box spring mattresses laid on dirt floors. Further down the street were steel drum barrels, cut in half and aflame, throwing light and some heat into the cold night. Delivering our carriage, we returned to claim our money and to make our first purchase - rice. We would need another \$150 bolivianos to pay rent for the night and purchase water. Nicole got a job boiling a pot of water for the store owner’s wife, while Sandy got a job scattering a bucketful of rocks along the road.

For the next hour, the families scurried about doing work, but also dealing with thieves and treacherous cops. Nearly all got a lesson on false witness - one of the seven things we learned that God hates in Proverbs 6:16-19. “Would you like some money?” a shawl-draped woman asked Peggy’s family. “Is this for real?” Peggy asked. “Oh yes, let me give this to you”, the woman said, gesturing with her crumpled bolivianos in her hand.

Peggy extended her hand to receive the gift. “Police!” the woman screamed, “This woman is stealing from me!”

At once a policewoman came to the scene. Again the hunched-over woman shrieked, “She’s stealing from me!” Peggy and her family looked stunned as they were led to a chicken wire-windowed shack - the jail. Through the chicken-wire and under flashlights, the questioning ensued, though the outcome would only be resolved with a hefty fine in bolivianos - some of which went to the woman.

Suddenly, curfew was announced. Jobs stopped immediately as families darted into an empty shack. Though Nicole’s water boiling job got us enough money for rent, Sandy’s job went unpaid in our rush to avoid the curfew police. Our family would be without water.

A beggar peered into our dark, tiny shack, and asked in a low voice, “Can I stay here?” I shined my key-fob light at Sarah, who signed the request to Sandy and Nicole. They nodded yes. Soon a policewoman appeared at our shack, questioning us: “Is everyone here your family?”, looking especially at the troublesome beggar. This was the same woman who earlier had stolen our proof of rent and given the receipt to the store owner/landlord. He feigned ignorance when we told him that we had already paid for the rent. Another \$100 bolivianos later, our receipt was returned to us. I asked Sandy and Nicole again, “Is this woman staying with us?” They looked at her with some compassion, knowing that the beggar would be thrown in jail if we said no. “Yes,” Nicole signed, “She stays with us.” At least one story of grace would be told this night.

Do you want to volunteer?

Whether you come daily, monthly or for an extended stay, your skills are valuable and needed. Our volunteers help maintain the campus, present our programming and serve everywhere in between!

Contact Haley Lewis, lewish@sifat.org, to find out how you can volunteer.

In slums across Central and South America, stories of survival and betrayal like these are repeated. One-day jobs, bribe-taking police, collusion and conspiracies among hustlers and store owners - all combine to create injustice. During our devotional at the end of our slum experience, I heard a commonly used term - “unfortunate people” - used in describing people in poverty. But this experience taught me otherwise. There are no “unfortunate people,” just hard-working people trapped in a circumstance that creates misfortune and misery. Another SIFAT lesson learned.

As our group walked back to the International House for bedtime, I looked back toward our group. I saw the teens smiling and pointing to each other and signing, “you beggar - you false witness!” In my pocket was an unspent boliviano. By tomorrow night, that boliviano would be spent - and that’s another story.

Tom Hudspeth, pastor for deaf ministries at Lovers Lane UMC in Dallas, Texas, recently participated in a SIFAT retreat. The retreat was a success, and Sarah Lewis, our volunteer, translated to give their leaders a chance to participate.



SIFAT Remembers...

As SIFAT approaches our 30th year of sharing God's love in practical ways, cofounders Ken and Sarah Corson are writing this column to focus on accomplishments, struggles and important moments from past years. Ken is posting bonus material on our blog, too. We hope you enjoy remembering these years with us!

Two Groups that SIFAT Targets

Sarah and I agreed with the terms of the Bolivian Church that we were to live at the level of the people where we were sent. The church in Sapacho built us a very practical one room house. The roof was palm thatch. The walls were bamboo. The floor was dirt.

Living on a Bolivian pastor's salary at the level of the people we went to serve was a bit idealistic to say the least. When various members of our family became ill and there was no doctor, no drug store, no transportation, no communication we had to ask ourselves at times, have we been foolish? I have since told people that there is a thin line between faith and foolishness, and I have been on both sides of that line.

One of the biggest problems all of us encountered in Sapecho was how to keep dry during the intense rainy season. The rain poured into everyone's house through the bamboo and thatch. Our floor became mud. There was a big puddle of muddy water right in the middle of our one room. All our clothes, books and everything we owned became damp, if not outright wet. Soon everything was mildewed, even our store of rice, our main food. Every day for weeks, the skies dumped rivers of water on us all. We slept on wet beds for a month. Many people, especially children, became sick and some died.

And then, a teenage orphan boy came to Sapecho looking for work. Before his parents died, they ran a brick making business. Florencio knew how to make fired brick!

We shared our food and gave him a place to build a grass hut in our yard and he taught us how to make fired brick out of the mud. The answer to our problem was under our feet...mud!

Benjo, the mayor of Sapecho, became our coworker. He wrote a grant proposal to Habitat for Humanity. Because of our brick project making resources for houses available in the jungle, they accepted, and today the whole architecture of that area has changed. People live in brick houses, protected from the harsh rainy season.

Perhaps we would never have understood the tremendous need for dry housing if we had not lived through that first rainy season in a bamboo hut. We found that we could understand people's needs better, by walking in their shoes, by becoming poor with the poor. We are middle class Christians. We call ourselves Mid-Pew American. We also need to identify with the poor and marginalized as Christ did...to learn from them, work with them for the Kingdom of God. Our training practicum is for leaders serving the poor. When we share in their lives and their suffering, we can better understand ourselves and our own culture. Then all of us together participate more fully in the life more abundant that Jesus brings. *SIFAT's two target groups--the ones we want to bring together to help each other--are The Poor of the World and Mid-Pew America.*

Help SIFAT continue making a difference in our world:

Become a SHAREholder by pledging to give monthly. Together, we can demonstrate Christ's love to impoverished peoples. Contact Marie Lanier, lanierm@sifat.org, or visit www.sifat.org/share.html.

Claude Hurtt Joins Staff

For those who have called our accounting office in the last couple of months, you have gotten a chance to meet Claude Hurtt, our new accountant. Scotty Turner retired at the end of 2007 and, thankfully, stayed with us until Claude was prepared to begin working as our accountant.

Most recently, Claude worked in Birmingham with Alabama Public Television. He and his wife, Cheryl, spent six years as missionaries in South America, including Ecuador and Peru. Claude continues to serve as pastor of a Spanish-speaking church in Gadsden.

Claude is a great addition to our staff, and we hope you will welcome him. If you have questions about your donation or need to talk to our accounting office, please call Claude or e-mail him at hurttc@sifat.org.

Don't forget: you can donate online!

You can donate online using a credit card or PayPal account!

Go to www.sifat.org, and click "donate" to get started!

Do you want to designate your gift for a particular fund or in honor/memory of someone? If so, just e-mail Claude (hurttc@sifat.org) after donating, and he will credit it appropriately.

Practicum Alumni Visit

Jhony Bandela, of Hyderabad, India, graduated from the Practicum in 2006. After returning to India, he realized these were classes his wife, Prasuna Gajula, needed to attend. Prasuna graduated last year, and she returned to India prepared to implement what they learned in Grace & Truth Ministries.

Grace & Truth Ministries was founded by Jhony's brother in 1998. Currently, Grace & Truth supports a small orphan home, where Prasuna is mother to 28 children. The ministry also runs a mission school with 850 students and a staff of 45. They travel to rural communities outside the city and use the Project Light English as a Second Language program to conduct adult literacy classes.

Prasuna says that Project Light has been the most effective way for them to teach English. They have 30 class members and travel about 30 kilometers to the village. Jhony adds that they travel on a motorbike, but hope to buy a small car this year or next.

Although the Grace & Truth staff is busy with all of these ministries, they have a new phase for which they are currently raising funds. Using their own money, Prasuna and Jhony purchased an acre of land. With financing, they can start building in three to four months and have the new phase finished in a year.

What is the new phase? Grace & Truth sees the need for a residential school for students from nearby communities. The government schools only teach in the local languages, but the students need to be able to speak English, which they would learn at the residential school. They also want to expand their orphan home and have a building they own, rather than the current building being rented. A home for widows and a church would complete this phase.

The funding for Grace & Truth comes from family friends and relatives. They have a partner church in the United States who sponsored the school. After visiting their contacts in the US, Prasuna and Jhony came to SIFAT to visit and rest before returning to India. They ask for your prayers for Grace & Truth Ministries as the expansion continues. If you are interested in contacting them, you may e-mail Jhony (jhony_bandela@yahoo.co.in) or Prasuna (prasuna_jhony2k7@yahoo.co.in).



Jhony (left) and Prasuna, SIFAT graduates from 2006 and 2007, have been visiting SIFAT while on a fund-raising trip to the United States. They are preparing to expand Grace & Truth Ministries when they return to India



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SIFAT's Vision: Bridging the First and Two-thirds Worlds to alleviate spiritual and physical poverty, encouraging people to develop their God-given potential.

SIFAT's Mission: To share God's love through service, education and personal involvement with a needy world.

From the Desk of Tom Corson

I have just returned from Israel--a trip that Dyla and I used to dream of taking when we were young. I had not even considered it in recent years, until a group of friends surprised me with the gift of this trip. I am very thankful to them for giving me this opportunity. To see the many churches marking the different sites where supposedly Jesus was born, lived, taught, died, rose again was a tremendous experience that helped me rethink what it means to be a Christian. Most of the tourists that go call themselves Christians; many come seeking to find the roots of their faith in the Holy Land. They are pouring into the country leaving millions of dollars behind in their sightseeing.

However, my friends and I were saddened by the conflict, by the buildings damaged from bullets and bombs and tourism with vendors everywhere seeking dollars. The atmosphere detracted from the spiritual experience. If those stones could talk, what heartbreaking stories they could tell! Through thousands of years these stones have seen so much violence and today they continue to be the stage where violence is normal for life there.

What if the millions of people who go on these pilgrimages were as driven to be the stones that make up a Living Church... a Church that actually is involved in the freeing message that Christ so earnestly pled for us to understand? In the midst of the monuments in Jerusalem, I could not help but remember that the Church is supposed to be light in the darkness. We visited Christians in Bethelhem who are on the edge of survival. They are trying to fulfill their mission of proclaiming Jesus, while they are desperate for just the basic necessities to stay alive. Around the world it is the same story: many struggle daily for clean drinking water, shelter, food. In Luke 4: 18 and 19, Jesus proclaimed his message to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...to release the oppressed, etc. As I walked down those streets where Jesus once walked, I was deeply impressed that to honor Jesus is not to build stone temples in memory of his life, but rather, to make our own bodies His temple where we get involved and act out His command of loving our neighbor. We, as Christians all over the world, are His Holy Lands!

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