

Learning to Love and Serve

Tom Corson
Executive Director

On our first trip to Ecuador since COVID, I met Mayita. She works as a tutor in our program for at-risk children in Villaflores. SIFAT teams built the after-school facility there, so that Pastor Rafael and his wife, SIFAT graduate Anita, have a place to welcome more children from the streets after school. This program teaches the children about Jesus, provides music and art classes and helps with their schoolwork. It guides them through the problems children living in slum environments face.

Mayita understands these problems. She still lives in this marginalized neighborhood. She says that her and her siblings' whole view of the world, and what they could do with their lives, was changed by this after-school program. Mayita is 23 and will be graduating soon as a high school teacher. "If it were not for the partnership of the church, Compassion International and SIFAT's teams, our lives would be entirely different," she told me. "I might be selling candy on the streets, instead of working to reach others, who are like I was, for God."

Because of glaucoma, Mayita's dad became blind in his 20s. His young children helped sell candies in a kiosk on the sidewalk. When they were forced to stop, he played guitar on the street. "We could see that he loved us, but it was hard, especially when there was not enough food," Mayita told us.

"Then, SIFAT teams built this facility, so there was room to include more of us. They fed us and helped us get through school. When SIFAT brought medical teams, they discovered that my sister and I had eye problems and would become

blind without surgery. This program got the surgery for us!"

"All we have achieved is because God is so amazing. We never stopped seeing His hand in our lives. It is why my parents are still alive. My brother is a music and art teacher. My sister is now a doctor and works in a rural area. She taught Sunday School when she was here, and my brother and I are both part of the praise and worship ministry. All of us want God to use our lives to give to others what has been given to us."

Pastor Rafael showed me a picture of Mayita digging holes on the construction site in Villaflores years ago. Mayita has also translated for our medical teams, taught in VBS and helped anywhere she was needed.



"God has given us so much; we want to give back," she explained. "People are in need, especially emotionally. When SIFAT teams come, they share their joy and love. It isn't just the food and medical care you bring us, it's the people who come to share with us and love us. It shows these kids that Jesus loves them. I know. I felt it when I was a kid. I will never forget the teams that came. I remember the crafts and still have a T-shirt that says *Jesus Loves Me*.

I remember how happy I was when I felt that someone cared about me. We are not used to that in our community, and when the teams come, it makes such an impact."

Mayita is one example of how SIFAT short-term teams produce long-term development!

As we said goodbye, she gave me a hug with a big smile and said, "Tell the people who sent you how much they have helped us. SIFAT teams not only serve people in poor neighborhoods, but they have taught us how to serve God, too!"

Marie Lanier Narváez
Promotions and Marketing Coordinator

Slowly, our car creeps up a steep mountain, scraping speed breakers while we reminisce about our first visits to Atucucho, a neighborhood in Quito, Ecuador, where SIFAT has been serving for more than 20 years. As we arrive at our destination, a nondescript concrete building among a row of buildings in various stages of construction, we see a line of people winding down the next hill. Dr. Roberto Contreras, Tom Corson, Peggy Walker and I climb out of the car to choruses of Buenos Dias! as we make our way to the door. We are quickly wrapped up in the arms of Ledy Sanchez, a SIFAT graduate and the driving force behind SIFAT's work in this area.

Ledy guides us into a bustling kitchen, full of ladies cutting vegetables and stirring gigantic, steaming pots. Smiles are abundant, and the smells are vibrant with a breakfast drink in one pot with cinnamon and anise and the beginnings of chicken soup in another. These women prepare meals for about 400 children and 80 elderly every day. Ledy tells us she starts baking fresh bread every morning at 4 a.m. But we do not have time to keep exploring this kitchen, lifting lids and chatting with the ladies, because that line of people needs their breakfast.

We are ushered into a doorway, where we move a table to make a makeshift walkup window. Peggy and I serve steaming cups of morocho, a traditional milk drink with corn and spices, and fresh bread. As we start thinking that the line is dwindling, and we are finishing, more people arrive. As Ledy refills our pot of morocho, we realize we are just

starting. Instead of passing a cup to each person, we are now receiving some type of container: a pitcher, an old plastic container, a tea kettle, a pot with a lid and carrying handle or maybe even a boiler. As each person steps up, Ledy tells us how many people need to be fed from this container. Of course, when she knows they need extra because of the lack of food in their homes, she tells us to give them a yapa, a little gift. That means one to two more ladles of morocho and some extra smiles. We run out of bread before we run out of customers, so we give out more yapas. Morocho gets spilled over our hands and down the containers, but no one complains or is frustrated with our inefficiency. Instead, they thank us and laugh with us.



SIFAT graduate Ledy Sanchez has led The Golden Bread in Atucucho during the pandemic.

As we finish serving breakfast, Ledy explains more about the people we just met. She tells us that at the beginning of the pandemic, her ladies went door to door carrying heavy containers to take breakfast to these elderly people. Many are unable to walk the steep terrain where they live, while others were terrified to leave their homes for fear of getting sick. The cost to deliver meals became too much, so Ledy found neighbors and relatives to come to the kitchen to take the food back to those who need it. When the lockdowns lifted, she urged those who are physically able to come themselves. However, they do not just receive breakfast. First, she has them meet at a field behind Little Seeds of God, the daycare center SIFAT teams built many years ago. They walk 20 laps, so that they get much needed exercise, as well as the socialization they lacked while confined in their homes. After their exercise, they eat breakfast. Many sit together on the sidewalk and chat.

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Be part of SIFAT all year! Monthly commitments — our SHARE program — help us budget effectively. Sign up at www.sifat.org/donate or contact Marie Lanier, lanierm@sifat.org.

Leave a Legacy

Did you know that you can donate stocks or leave provisions for SIFAT in your will? Contact Tom Corson, corson@sifat.org, for more information.

Buy a Brick in Sarah's Garden

Honor friends or family in a special way: buy a commemorative brick in their honor or memory for Sarah's Garden! Order online at www.brickrus.com/order/sifat.

ast in Atucucho

This is Ledy's daily schedule, and she was so joyful during our visit. She talked about completing her degree in early childhood education recently, which was a dream of hers. Although she has been leading daycare centers that receive high government ratings, she wanted the formal education that could help her do even more for these people that she loves deeply. She nonchalantly spoke of different programs that are offered in Atucucho because of her tenacity and work. As she shared the latest news, she was weaving in her hopes and dreams for future programs. However, my mind kept returning to baking bread for at least 80 people every morning. That would be enough, yet Ledy keeps finding opportunities to pour into Atucucho. It is not the same neighborhood Tom and Peggy encountered on their first visit in 2000, nor is it the same one that I saw for the first time in 2007. Instead, we see an area slowly climbing out of poverty, in part because of Ledy's leadership and determination.

Ledy cannot do all of this on her own. She has a team of women working alongside her in the kitchen, and she also has the love and encouragement of former mission team members and SIFAT supporters. Because of our SIFAT family, SIFAT Doctor in your House and The Golden Bread provided medicines and funding for food during the pandemic and continues today. Although we see improvements in Atucucho, the truth is that this area is still in deep poverty and the people who call this area home are struggling to survive. After two years of lockdowns and economic hardship caused by the pandemic, they were just starting to see hope again. But a national strike led by the major indigenous association shut Ecuador down for 18 days. Food, gas and medical supplies could not be delivered, and demonstrations became violent as this group of people insisted the government meet a list of 10 demands or remove the president. This political unrest further damaged Ecuador's fragile economy. While we thought these two programs were winding down, Dr. Roberto shares that, instead, the needs are growing throughout the city.

Please continue to pray for Ledy and SIFAT graduates like her that are Sharing God's Love in Practical Ways throughout the world, often in conditions and situations that we do not fully understand. Your generous and sacrificial gifts to SIFAT allow us to reach the least of these and truly do make a difference in the lives of the poor. We witnessed this firsthand on our morning in Atucucho. It is more than just a cup of morocho and a roll; it is love in action and taking care of our neighbors, even those who live a continent away. In the words of the sweet people we served, Dios le pague/God will repay you!



To support these programs, please designate your gift *SIFAT Doctor in your House!*

SIFAT Grad Joins Staff in Costa Rica



Kathy Bryson
International Training Director

David Rojas of Guatemala is a graduate of the National Agriculture University of Honduras. He is also a 2016 SIFAT graduate and subsequently served as a volunteer for six months on our campus in Lineville, Ala. Later, David came to Costa Rica to help with the initial work at the Methodist Center near Ciudad Quesada. Now, we welcome him back as full-time staff at our Central American Training Center in La Tigra, Costa Rica!

David's mother and brother are also SIFAT graduates. David brings many skills to this mission—his life experiences on the family farm and in various microenterprises, coupled with his practical skills in appropriate technologies and mechanics, his excellent managerial and people skills, but most of all his commitment and heart to invest his time and talent serving others. What a blessing to have David as an integral part of the SIFAT team in Costa Rica!

"I am so happy to be a part of the SIFAT staff and to be able to share God's love with all His children in practical ways," David said. "Thank you so much to all the SIFAT supporters for making it possible for me to be here and for supporting this program to help many people around the globe."

Venezuelans Collaborate in Costa Rica

Kathy Bryson
International Training Director

SIFAT graduate Yurima Alvarez grew up a city girl. She never imagined herself promoting family gardens and organic agriculture in small town Venezuela. But when political crisis made food scarcity a daily problem for neighbor families, she decided to act by starting a small community garden. Now, the interest in food production has grown incredibly in her marginalized community. Thanks to supporters, Yurima visited SIFAT's Central American Training Center (CATC) in Costa Rica for one month of intensive training in sustainable family gardens in small plots.

Costa Rica has a tropical climate more similar to Venezuela, so growing techniques are more appropriate than those in North America. She is learning

how to compost, fortify the soil with mountain microbes, rotate crops, save seed, irrigate with little water, start a nursery and more. SIFAT trainer Oswaldo Paez, originally of Venezuela, brings years of experience in Costa Rica in organic gardening and agroecology to our CATC and is delighted to share practical skills with Yurima that she can take home and implement in her community. It is a joy to see them working together in the garden—and hard to tell who is more excited!

Will you contribute to our training scholarship fund to help other community leaders learn practical skills to combat hunger? People are waiting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bolivia, Honduras and other countries to come for training in sustainable solutions for hunger and poverty. Designate your gift *training scholarship*.



Oswaldo teaches Yurima about intensive garden beds. Brazilian and Thai spinach, pictured above, are easy to grow in the tropics and full of needed iron and vitamin A for malnourished children.

Being a Light in the Midst of Darkness

Yurima Alvarez
SIFAT Graduate in Venezuela

God called me as a missionary in 1993 to southern Venezuela's border with Colombia to share the Gospel among the children of those communities and to train evangelist teachers of children. I meant to give a year of my life to mission work, but in 1994, I attended SIFAT's training practicum in Renuevo, Venezuela. I changed my mind about staying only one year.

The teams that came with SIFAT to El Renuevo began to work with us to help establish new churches. I was in charge of one of the churches in Naranjales, and God called me to stay. Now 28 years later, I continue my work in missions in Naranjales. I have come several times to SIFAT's campus in Alabama to learn new technologies that have been a blessing in our community.

As a result of a political and economic crisis in my country and the scarcity of basic services (such as water, electricity, domestic gas, food, gasoline, transportation, cleaning supplies and toiletries), many individuals and entire families have left our country, while others have adapted to the corrupt system to survive. That is why I am grateful to God for allowing us as a church to be light in the midst of darkness, not only by preaching His gospel of Salvation, but also by using the appropriate technologies I learned at SIFAT to help people with basic needs.

We are currently developing a community school garden project called Jezreel, where we will teach various technologies. The main one is Leaf for Life to use the nutrients of leaves to improve the nutrition of our communities. During the pandemic, God allowed us to sell fresh vegetables at the doors of each house, which opened doors for us to talk about His love and care.

I am also grateful that I was able to be at SIFAT this summer helping with the Learn & Serve groups. I visited some churches to share what God has been doing in my country, showing His mercy and faithfulness in the midst of our stressful situation. I will be in Costa Rica in August to update my knowledge in the area of tropical agriculture. And in September, I will return to Venezuela to continue serving God there by sharing His love in practical ways. Thank you for your support, for your prayers and for your love. God bless you every day!



Yurima teaches Learn & Serve participants how to make arepas during a slum experience.

International Graduates' Projects

Visit our website to see current projects and fully funded graduates' projects.

www.sifat.org/international-missions/international-projects

To become a project champion to raise funds or for more information, contact GPC chairman Art Stephenson, stephensona@sifat.org.

Internships in Costa Rica

Internship Program

Support the SIFAT internship program in Costa Rica! Because of your donations, we can accept international students to come for a three-month internship to work on a specific project that can provide solutions for hunger and poverty. They earn college credit from their universities for their projects and receive a SIFAT certificate for practical skills in community development. Their work adds to our Central American Training Center to serve as learning demonstrations.

Internships for North Americans

We have a limited number of spaces for North American students interested in three-month internships in Costa Rica focused on tropical agriculture, natural resources/ecology, appropriate technologies or children and youth programs. It is a wonderful opportunity to improve Spanish language skills while living on campus with Latin Americans. Applications and positions available year-round. For more information, contact Kathy Bryson, brysonk@sifat.org.

Edible Art in Costa Rica

Kathy Bryson
International Training Director

We had fun making edible art from fresh fruits and veggies in the children's program in Costa Rica. The kids enjoyed making their creations and being "allowed" to play with their food! It was neat to see children eat raw carrots for the first time because they got to make a stick figure stuck together with peanut butter on their plates first. Then, we all enjoyed the smoothie our Honduran intern Javier made out of dried spinach powder mixed with bananas, orange and guanabana fruit juice. The presentation in fancy little cups helped this first experience to be a positive one.

Activities like this are an entertaining way to get kids involved in eating healthier. It is a worthy challenge to find effective ways to increase Vitamin A and iron in children's diets. An estimated 1 in 3 children in the developing world suffer from micronutrient deficiency with severe consequences. Child mortality is greatly impacted by malnutrition. Those who survive bear the consequences of early deprivation for a lifetime. Growing healthy foods is important, but encouraging people to eat it is vital. Instilling healthy habits early makes a difference for a lifetime. We will continue promoting healthy eating and new recipes using our produce.



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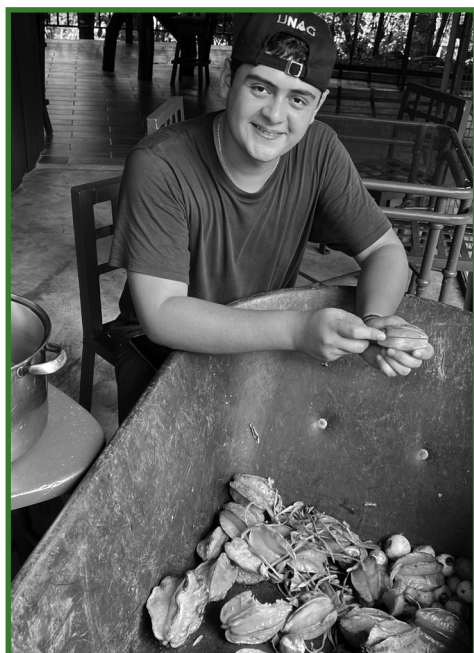
updates between issues of *The SIFAT Journal*!

e-mail address to info@sifat.org.

Are you moving? E-mail your new mailing address, phone number or

Would your church like copies of *The SIFAT Journal* or brochures? Let us know how many you need.

Honduran Interns Explore Food Processing



Kathy Bryson
International Training Director

Three of our Honduran interns at our Central American Training Center in Costa Rica are focusing on processing specific plants with potential for income generation. Olanda is using a distiller to generate essential oil extracts from plant leaves. Her project focuses on two kinds of basil, but the technique can be applied to many plants. She has made soap from basil extract combined with our goat milk and other ingredients.

Nicole is focusing on processing turmeric. This root crop in the ginger family grows exceedingly well here. She is comparing different methods of

grating, drying and grinding it into a fine powder, ready to use in recipes for cooking or a mix of "golden tea," which is known for anti-inflammatory qualities and other health benefits.

Javier's project is drying Brazilian spinach and grinding it into a fine powder to be incorporated into a variety of foods accepted locally, such as tamales and tortillas. Additionally, he is making cookies and smoothies with this powder, which instantly fortifies them with iron and Vitamin A needed by children. Javier constructed a homemade appropriate technology food dryer to improve food processing of these leaves, as well as other fruits and vegetables.

Hope Makes a Difference

Kathy Bryson
International Training Director

After a long day shopping for supplies in the nearest large town, we settled down to enjoy a meal in the mall's food court. And there they were. Two girls about 6 and 9 years old with big brown eyes and dark curly hair appeared next to our table. The older girl asked if we could spare a little food or some change because they were hungry. She proceeded to tell us a tale that would make a gripping movie. They had been traveling a long time and were very tired and had not had any food to eat.

Where did you come from? Venezuela. How? We walked many days through the jungle and slept under the trees. At night, it was scary. There were wild animals. Then, there were some very mean people who did very bad things to my mother and my aunt.

It dawned on me these people had just come through the infamous Darien Gap—the narrow connecting land path between South America (Colombia) and Central America (Panama). It is a notoriously dangerous place and one of the rainiest places on the planet. I heard about these immigrants in news reports. It seemed so far away, but now, they were in front of me. I did not doubt they were hungry.

From January through June, more than 19,000 immigrants made this treacherous journey by foot. An estimated 30% were children less than 5 years old. They are still coming. A few die along the way. Many live with lifelong traumas. God, help us to reach out and care about this human tragedy without getting bogged down in politics and name-calling!

As a mother of four, I know what it is like to travel with young children. I

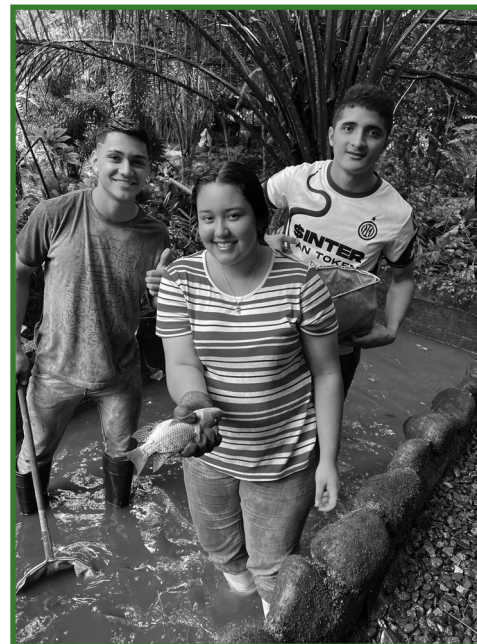
would have to be quite desperate to take them on a trip through jungles, cities and dangers. You could not build a wall high enough to keep me from trying to get over it, IF I thought that was my only HOPE for a future for them.

"Follow me," I said, as we went to the fried chicken stand. "Sit and eat with us." They hesitated, then said, "But, we want to share it with the others." "How many are with you?" She started counting. "Eight," she responded.

I got eight big pieces of chicken and drinks, then asked, "Where are the others?" At the corner of the mall was the bus station, where their fellow travelers were sitting on benches with all their worldly possessions in hand. The children gathered around and eagerly started to eat. A young woman stood up and thanked me for the chicken. I told them I used to live in Venezuela (where SIFAT had a training center) and that I was sorry about the current situation there. They seemed too exhausted to talk much. Another woman's glassy green eyes still haunt me. She had a blank stare—of someone who seemed to be a shell of a person.

When I came into town during rainy season downpours, I noticed groups with their backpacks, blankets and children huddled under awnings on sidewalks. Now, I realized they are Venezuelans, who have traveled all these miles from South America through Central America to Costa Rica, hoping to find a safe place.

Yurima, our SIFAT graduate from Venezuela, is with us, learning more ways to help her community. She was heartbroken to see people from her country living on the streets here, their children having to beg to survive. "I just wish they had more HOPE that they could make it at home!" she said.



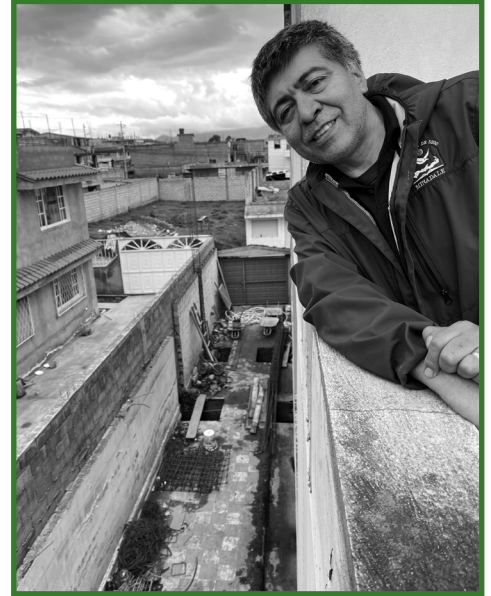
Our interns in Costa Rica are learning practical ways to give people HOPE!

People need HOPE. They must be desperate to leave everything behind to make this long journey north to try to find a future. Too often, the journey brings unimaginable dangers, and their lives end up even worse.

Yurima is returning to Venezuela to share what she has learned with her community with food shortages. Others throughout our world are making a difference with small acts of great love. The children were in my dreams, and many more were with them—children from Ukraine, Uganda, Pakistan, the slums in the USA and all over the world! We can think globally and work locally where we are. With God's help, we can make a difference.

Yurima told us she received three phone calls from women in her community who decided not to leave because they knew she was going to return to show them how to have their own kitchen gardens. With food, they could feed their children. That brought them HOPE!

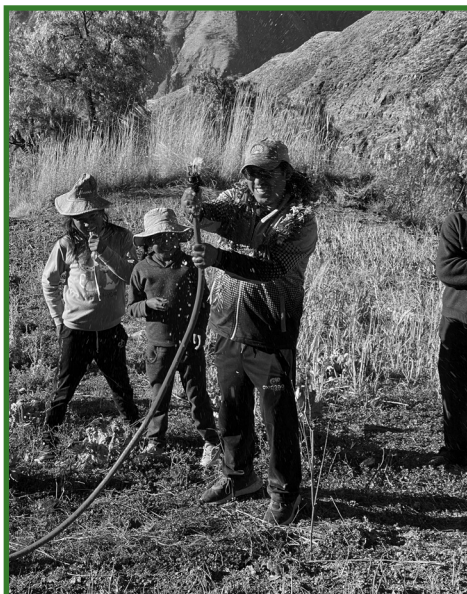
Teams Return to Bolivia and Ecuador



Join a SIFAT Mission Team!

We are planning teams for 2023! There is a place for you to serve, no matter your skills. Don't miss out on an incredible experience! Join a team or lead a team from your church or community.

[www.sifat.org/
international-missions](http://www.sifat.org/international-missions) or email
internationalteams@sifat.org



Tears of Joy in Ecuador

Peggy Walker
International Team Coordinator

What a homecoming we had on our first trip back to Ecuador since 2019! Hugs kept coming, and tears would not stop flowing as our team walked into Pastor Rafael and Anita's church in Villaflora that first Sunday morning. There was absolute joy!

It is often hard for us to imagine what they have experienced in Ecuador since COVID-19 started spreading in 2020. Although in complete lockdowns for months, most of the middle class were inconvenienced, but fine. In the areas where SIFAT works, however, it was a different story. Not being able to leave their houses meant not even jobs like housekeeping, construction, selling candy on the streets or doing laundry were available. There were no government subsidies and no medical clinics open if immediate care was needed. The only thing they could rely on was the rice provided by our SIFAT graduates at churches and daycare centers, the hot breakfast given to the elderly in Atucucho and Dr. Roberto's telemedicine ministry, all made possible because of SIFAT's donor-supported *Doctor in Your House* program. I have no words to tell you what a lifeline that was to thousands of people, most of whom are proud people eking out a meager living for their families any way possible. While SIFAT is normally a development organization, relief seemed necessary during this time, and you helped us answer that need!



SIFAT Ecuador director Dr. Roberto Contreras and his wife, Monica, presented SIFAT executive director Tom Corson with a medal on behalf of the Ecuadorian government awarded to SIFAT for our work with at-risk children. Our lawyer in Ecuador nominated SIFAT for this prestigious award.

After several cancellations because of a resurgence of COVID and political unrest, we brought two eager, hard-working teams in July to break ground on the new project in Machachi and to bring much-needed medical care to almost 300 patients. And VBS, what can you say? Until you have been hugged by those beautiful Ecuadorian children, you just have not been hugged. It was almost like starting over for all of us, as we were in a new hotel, no longer had the old SIFAT bus and had new translators. However, the teams found their stride, and our Ecuadorian staff was almost asking us to slow down, saying we were ahead of their schedule. SIFAT teams had been waiting for two years, and they were ready to serve!

The small 12' by 54' footprint at Machachi makes it challenging for the construction teams to work so close together, especially until all the footers have been finished and the holes covered with concrete. This first floor will house the expanded sanctuary and new bathrooms. The church is growing so rapidly that they must have room to expand, and there is absolutely no other place on the church property to build. The upper floors will have a kitchen and dining room, where the ladies in the church will feed more than 150 children in the afterschool program. It will also have a small clinic for the children and classrooms. They are utilizing every inch of the current building to accommodate the needs of the church, which has become so important to the children of this community.

We hope to finish this project in Machachi in two years, if we have the number of teams needed for construction. We also need as many medical teams as possible to serve at each of our six projects around Quito, especially now with the children suffering from malnutrition after the pandemic. A VBS component is a wonderful addition on every team. The children have been away from in-school classes for two years and are behind academically. They are eager to learn, to laugh and to have that affection and social interaction they receive with our team members.

If you have not served on a SIFAT mission team recently and would like to experience God's love in action, please join us in 2023. Even better, organize a team in your church, club or community! Ecuador is a great place to bring your family and all ages are welcomed. For more information, email me at walkerp@sifat.org or internationalteams@sifat.org. We are happy to set up a Zoom meeting or conference call, too. The beautiful people with whom we serve in Ecuador are waiting for your arrival with more hugs and endless tears of joy!

Whoever is kind to
the poor lends to
the Lord, and he
will reward them
for what they have
done.

Proverbs 19:17 (niv)



Learn & Serve intern Tyler Collins, SIFAT graduate Angel Roman and campus program manager Josiah Corson get Sawyer water filters from our inventory for Angel to take back to Bolivia. After natural disasters and with our project sites in remote areas, CENATEC/SIFAT Bolivia provides millions of gallons of clean, safe drinking water.

Making Dreams Reality in Uganda

Peggy Walker
International Team Coordinator

SIFAT has always had one goal for the children at Agape Total Childcare Center, the orphanage in Uganda founded in 2008 by SIFAT graduate William Nsubuga. We hoped to provide a safe environment, a loving “home” for these HIV/AIDS-orphaned children, where they would know God, develop self-esteem and receive the education needed to become tomorrow’s responsible citizens.



SIFAT sponsors have provided funds for most of our original 45 children to finish trade school or university after graduation from Agape Christian Academy. These students are now earning a good living with thoughts about providing for a future family of their own. They have worked hard to make their dreams a reality.

Now, we have five students hoping to graduate soon, but the funds have not been found to pay their tuition for the next semester. We need your help.

Sarah lost both parents at a very young age and is studying law, wanting to fight against children’s sexual abuse. Carol and Racheal are studying education and hope to return to Agape as teachers. Liz has a dream to work with Google when she finishes her degree in computer science, as does Eric, one of Agape’s finest young men, a wonderful role model for the younger boys still living in the orphanage.

Each needs about \$2,500 next semester. We pray you will help them realize the life they thought could never be possible when William found them on the streets in Lugazi, Uganda, so many years ago. We have watched them grow from scared children to confident, hard working young adults. Designate your gift *Agape Tuition Fund*.

Becoming Humble Servants

Sonja Horn
Clanton FUMC Team Member

It is 1 a.m. We have just arrived at the airport in Quito after much delay and are making our way to the hotel. The bus is dark and quiet. We have begun this trip as mostly strangers. We are all exhausted. It has been a long day, and honestly, some of us are doubting the idea of this trip.

Then Jose gets up to greet us. He is our translator and in-country guide. He is holding his Bible—I do not think he goes anywhere without it. And he begins to thank us for being there. One thing he says strikes me and still impacts me to this day. “God has planned for each of you to be here together since before the foundation of the world. Wow! I let go of my expectations and my worries about what might and might not happen while in Quito. I ask God to do what he has planned for us—nothing more and nothing less. Thus begins a week that changed each of us forever.

During that bus ride, Jose also reminded us that the one word we needed to remember for the week was *flexible*—it is not about us; it is about what God’s plans are for us and for this trip.

And what does it mean to really be flexible? I think it means not worrying that the toilets may not flush today. The men of our trip might tell you it means moving that pile of rocks one more time to the same place it was just a few minutes ago. Jose might say that being flexible means saying yes to an extra day at the mercado because I need one more blanket, even though it is not on the itinerary. For the ladies, it might mean spending your hour at Supermaxi getting supplies for additional vacation bible school because we were not prepared for more than one lesson. Being flexible might mean changing



Sonja Horn traveled with Clanton FUMC on our first trip back to Ecuador since the pandemic began. She was excited to share about her experience with our SIFAT family.



your devotion to speak to the heart of everyone because God has whispered something in your ear.

That is the essence of what we learned in Quito. That to be a servant of God is to go where he leads without regard for what might be in it for you. Witnessing the love of the people that we were there to “serve” was one of the most humbling parts of our trip. While we might have been there to help with a few days of vacation bible school or setting 3 footers for an addition to the church, I think we all agree that we were the ones ministered to.

From the church service in Quito where we were greeted with the love of Christ in the most real and tangible way many of us have ever really experienced, to the most amazing lunches that were prepared for us every single day. We were met with smiles, hugs, laughs and encouragement. We, who come from a place with so much, were taught joy and love by being surrounded by those whose greatest possession is the love of Christ.

During one VBS lesson on the loaves

and fishes, the children were asked, how has God provided for you. Expecting to hear what one might hear in America (Xbox, iPhone, car), I was humbled when one young woman said, “He give us His word” and my spirit crushed when another said “He lets us know him”...From the mouth of babes, we were all reminded that at the end of the day, at the end of the week, at the end of our lives, we will be asked what did we do to share the love of Christ, to give the thirsty water, the hungry food, the naked clothing.

It is 1 p.m.; we are headed home. This time the bus is loud, boisterous. We are singing *This is the Day* as we leave the airport. We have experienced something profound; we are friends now in a special way. We are all thankful for the lessons learned in Quito. For the memories we made. For the friendships we forged. For the opportunity to serve. For the opportunity to witness the love of Christ in a new and powerful way. But most of all, we are thankful to be humble servants of the Most High God and to in some small way be part of His plan to love a lost and hurting world.

More Than a Week

Patricia Burley
Ecuador Mission Team Member
Alexander City Methodist Church

My family has been involved in mission trips since 2005. The first trip was to Mississippi right after Hurricane Katrina devastated the US coast. Our family then went to Ecuador for 2 years. The first trip to Ecuador was in 2007. My husband, Chris, and daughter, Taylor, went with our church team. They were touched by that trip. Chris returned feeling guilty for all that we had. He wanted to get rid of anything that he viewed as unnecessary (TV, phones, etc). After a time, and much prayer, he realized that God had blessed us and that we should use what God had blessed us with to help others. The following year, our family of four went to Ecuador together. And I have to admit, I totally understood how Chris felt now. Although I did not have the desire to rid ourselves of things, I did realize that we were to be using what we were blessed

with to help others. After that, we led a team to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota for nine years. To say that our family has embraced missions is an understatement.

But the question that needs to be asked is what is missions? In Mark 16, Jesus told his disciples “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” So that leads to the next question: what is the world to you? The world to you could be getting on a plane to travel to another country. The world to you could be getting on a church bus to travel two days to a Native American reservation. Or the world to you could be your neighborhood, school or church. One thing missions cannot be is a one-week trip! It should become an every day trip. We should wake up each day and ask, “God send someone into my world so that I may share your word and show your love to them.” Once we do that, we will have fulfilled the commission that God has given us. That is our mission trip.



Trish's daughter, Taylor, with one of their VBS friends in Machachi.

Always Room for More

Shelby Dickey
Learn & Serve Coordinator

I have been a part of SIFAT in many ways during the past 20 years. I have attended Learn & Serve as a student and served as a counselor. I have traveled to South America and learned from SIFAT's international graduates that work in their own communities. I have lived and worked internationally, but what amazes me—and why I am writing this article—is that no matter how many life-changing experiences you have had, there is always room for more. It can be as simple as a conversation. This is one of the beautiful things that SIFAT does: the simple life-changing opportunity to listen and be changed.

One day after a group left, Yurima, who helped in Learn & Serve this summer, shared more stories about her work in Venezuela. What she said about the poverty and hardship

there was difficult to hear, but what made such an impact was the impression she left on me. I think Jesus did this for those who met Him in person. Her story was about compassion, sacrifice and extraordinary love. And while I know that Yurima herself is not Jesus, she follows closely to his example by the way she loves those around her. We all know that as busy and crazy as life is right now, we need to hear those stories and be reminded of what selfless love looks like. We often forget. We get busy and try to squeeze service and compassion in when we can, but our second-thought love does not leave an impact on the world.

We need conversations with people. We need to remember and reset almost weekly, so that we can be radically selfless lovers of Jesus and others. I want to be full of compassion and love, and I hope to always listen so I can grow. If you need help with that, SIFAT provides a great place to have a conversation and be reminded.



IRA Contributions

If you are required to take a disbursement from your IRA, you can donate a percentage or all of it directly to SIFAT. By donating to a nonprofit without receiving the disbursement, you do not pay taxes on the disbursement.

Matching Funds

Does your employer match your donation to SIFAT? Many companies do, and some even match donations of retirees or spouses of employees.

Questions or Need Help?

Contact Diana, accounting@sifat.org, if documentation is needed for your company's matching funds or if you have questions about getting your IRA donation sent directly to SIFAT.

Welcome New L&S Staff



We are excited to welcome Kaitlyn Glenn to our campus staff as our L&S programming assistant. We have two interns, Tyler Collins and Madison Gnoose, who will be serving on our campus, while they learn more about SIFAT and international community development!

Pictured left to right: Kaitlyn, Tyler, Madison, Josiah Corson and Shelby Dickey.

Seven Years of L&S and Still Life-Changing

Tori Dahlgren
2022 Learn & Serve Counselor

Think globally, act locally. When we think about poverty, we tend to think of “penny-a-day” commercials that show starving children. While that is poverty that needs to be addressed, not everyone has the opportunity to fly across the world to help these people. That is where SIFAT comes in.

I have learned so much from both. I remember having my eyes opened when I learned people are starving, homeless and sick in the U.S. While others travel to pray for the sick, who is here showing God's love in our own backyard? As a student, I remember thinking how difficult it must be to hear about this all-loving God when you and your family are starving and homeless. It is easy for us to talk about God when we have a nice home, clothes, food and electronics. SIFAT teaches appropriate technology. When we think of technology, we think of phones, computers and televisions. Technology can be as simple as using our resources for practical purposes.



Tori led music at L&S this summer!

Rocket stoves, water filters, plant and bug life—these are all things SIFAT teaches to share God's love in practical ways.

While learning all these things, we develop familial relationships between the participants and counselors. Among the trees and creeks of the SIFAT campus, we experience the Lord's creations and build relationships. Being surrounded by others who love God is empowering emotionally and spiritually. In my seven years at SIFAT, all the staff members made me feel loved and welcomed as a child of God. Being able to build a community has ignited my servant's heart and has set my soul aflame for God. Every experience has something to offer from the quiet mornings at the creek to the sunsets at the Q-Hut. SIFAT can be a place for the spiritually broken and impoverished to find the love of Christ in a safe, beautiful environment. God has called us to be fishers of men, and SIFAT is the best place to cast off. My life and relationship with God have only strengthened because of SIFAT and its community. I pray that other lives are changed through God's work at SIFAT.

Learning Through Experiences

Angie Goldberg
Garden Manager, HEART Village

Editor's Note: Angie, the garden manager at HEART Village in central Florida, met Josiah and Caroline in January. Angie is a graduate student at Northwest University studying international community development. She visited our campus in Alabama to interview our staff, observe our organization and participate in programming to complete her fieldwork in ethnographic and qualitative research. Angie is also spending a week at our Central American Training Center in Costa Rica at the end of July.



From the moment I arrived, the beauty and tranquility of the campus has given me a sense of peace and healing from the inside out. Everywhere I walk, there is something to see and explore. The summer interns gave me a tour of the Global Village, and I got to experience walking across the rope bridge. I cannot imagine having to walk over it with animals across my shoulders. While walking through these homes, memories came flooding back of places I have been, and my heart felt reawakened for these nations.

I got to participate in part of the slum experience with Learn & Serve. Some say experience is the greatest teacher. Judging by the looks on some participant's faces as they went through the experience, it is not one they will soon forget. Learning through the experience of how most of the world lives is an invaluable lesson teaching gratitude, compassion and empathy.

Above all these, my favorite part about being at SIFAT has been talking with the people. I have had the opportunity to sit down with Ken and Sarah Corson, Tom Corson, Caroline and Josiah Corson and many others. Hearing their stories and thoughts on life and development has enriched not only my research, but my life. I am looking forward to my time in Costa Rica and all that I will learn from the people there.

For those of us who have the opportunity to travel internationally, having training about what we will see and who we will encounter is incredibly valuable. For those who cannot travel internationally, coming to SIFAT in Alabama is a wonderful alternative I highly recommend! While learning about the rest of the globe, you still walk away with a sense of being inspired to go and serve the beautiful people right in front of you, wherever you are. What a beautiful picture God has called us to!

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Save the Date!

GivingTuesday2022



Nov. 29, 2022

Lifelong Lessons from Learn & Serve

Editor's Note: These articles were submitted by youth leaders who brought their groups to SIFAT this summer. One has attended Learn & Serve for years, while the other had her first experience alongside her students. Both believe in the lessons learned by youth and adults.

Luv Dubose

Assistant Director of Youth Ministries
FUMC Montgomery (Ala.)

First United Methodist Church of Montgomery has always been known for the way our students have served others. Fighting poverty, promoting justice, serving others and sending out disciples are core values of our youth ministry. The youth department provides service and missions opportunities throughout the year, such as an in-town missions week, Angel Tree Christmas gifts and mission trips. This summer, we decided to do something different for our middle school mission trip.

I had heard a lot about Learn & Serve, but I had never participated. It fit perfectly in our summer schedule and seemed like a great opportunity for our students. I am not entirely sure I knew what I was getting into when I signed up our church—but to say it would be a life-changing week would be an understatement.

I took a group of middle school girls and our summer intern, loaded up our church van and headed to SIFAT for a week. We had NO idea what the week had to offer. When I say I went in as blind as my girls, I am being completely honest. We were unprepared! But that made our journey more realistic. As we set out as refugees, we truly felt displaced. We were confused, hungry, frustrated and more. It was beautiful to watch our girls take on jobs, fight for justice, witness to people and work to feed their friends and families in these simulations. I watched them learn about global poverty in a hands-on way. I cannot describe how much we took away from this week, because it is truly something that you must experience in person!

Shortly after my time at SIFAT, I led a trip to Costa Rica, where we spent time serving in the slums of San Jose. I was able to be so present with people and serve well. I attribute that to the training I received at SIFAT. SIFAT does such a great job of helping you to SEE people instead of seeing circumstances. They equip leaders and students to go into the world to share the love of Jesus by loving people in practical ways. I am so thankful for the opportunity I had this summer to take my students to SIFAT! I encourage everyone to go.

Clinton Wheeler

Youth Minister, Cookeville FUMC (Tenn.)

SIFAT has been a part of my life for a long time. I came to my first Learn & Serve Summer Experience when I was in middle school. I remember walking across the bridge one morning and saying to myself, “I don’t ever want this feeling to end.” For the first time, I heard God’s voice telling me that I was called to youth ministry and that this is what he has in store for me. The next night, I accepted Christ as my savior and have been involved with youth and SIFAT ever since.

As I continue to go through Learn & Serve programming, I learn new things and have different experiences that change how I view my life and the world around me. For example, I went on a mission trip with my youth group to Quito, Ecuador, when I was in 11th grade. The next year, I went to SIFAT for the last time as a camper. When it was time to go to bed in the Global Village, the country that I slept in just happened to be Ecuador. I remember laying on the wood floor and looking at the stars through the roof. I thought to myself that someone from Ecuador is going to sleep just like I am right now. I had been to SIFAT several times before this, but this is the first time that I really had a sense of empathy for others around the world. Without SIFAT, I do not think I would have had this feeling and this realization.

Growing up, I knew that I wanted to be a youth minister, and it was always a dream to take my group of students to SIFAT one day. I have gotten to do that for the past two summers, and the results have been incredible! Students are learning for the first time that they truly have everything they need. Not only have their hearts grown for people around the world, but also in their own communities. Our youth want to help with anything that can bring service and love to someone who needs it. I give all the credit to SIFAT. Thank you, SIFAT, for the impact that you have made with my students, and thank you for the impact that you make with people around the world.

Schedule your fall or spring retreat today!
sifat.org/learn-serve | learnandserve@sifat.org





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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

This year, SIFAT will take five teams to Ecuador and one to Bolivia—our first teams since COVID started. No team is ever the same, but SIFAT does our best to make every team a “short-term team for long-term development.” In emergencies like this pandemic, we give relief. If our past teams had not helped us send food and medicine to those we have worked with in Ecuador, some would not have survived. But, we must go beyond relief.

People need more than money. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone.” People who have enough to live need to share with those who do not have their basic needs for survival. However, besides food and basic necessities, people need friends who believe in them, who encourage them to develop to their full potential. People do not just need to HAVE more, but to BE more, as we have shared about with Angel and Dr. Ruth in Bolivia and others in countries that were impacted by our teams. BEING MORE empowers people to HAVE MORE, so that with God's help, they can meet their own families' needs.

SIFAT teaches asset-based development. Look for people's talents and assets, then mirror back to them

the gifts and assets that they have to help them develop dignity and trust in themselves and in God. The poor do not need us to feel sympathy for them. They need us to be friends with them, to encourage them to develop the assets they have and to believe in them. Sometimes they have been so oppressed by poverty that they have not recognized the strength they have to change things with God's help. We are God's hands and feet here on earth!

SIFAT teams are not just a religious vacation or a trip. We have seen our teams give their friendship, their love, their encouragement ... themselves! That is what our hosts in other countries give to us. We call it incarnational love, because we want the love of Jesus to be incarnated in our very being, so that it can overflow into the lives of those we go to serve. And, we want to receive this same love from them as we have heard many times from team members, “we came to serve, but we are the ones that were served and blessed.” That kind of team helps us all to recognize the presence of Jesus in each of us. That makes a short-term team and the people they go to serve together become God's agents of long-term development.