



Servants in Faith and Technology /
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Our SIFAT Family is a Blessing on this World

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I just returned from spending three weeks in Ecuador with two mission teams serving in Machachi, south of Quito. During my trip, I met new friends and reconnected with others I had not seen in months or even years. Though our teams were small in number, they were mighty in love, compassion and energy!

One night during devotions with Carrollton FUMC, team members shared about how they had previously been involved with SIFAT. Britt, the team leader, had led mission teams to Ecuador, but he had also brought youth groups to participate in Learn & Serve retreats on our campus in Alabama. Angie served on campus work teams with her college ministry, and she also traveled to Ecuador as part of a study abroad team in 2019. Cole and Caroline attended Worship on the Water whenever they visited their grandparents at Lake Wedowee. As I listened, it was as though our summers at SIFAT were all in one room – international mission teams, Learn & Serve and WOW!



The second team had SIFAT veterans, too. Clear Lake UMC sends a work team to SIFAT each year, and several of this year's team members had been in Alabama in May. When their Ecuador team needed more team members, our SIFAT family answered the call to serve. Former team members from other churches joined Clear Lake's team.

During my time with both teams, I experienced seeing first time team members fall in love with our projects, project leaders and SIFAT training graduates, as well as the country of Ecuador. I hope they will be able to return in the future – I know when they left Quito, they wished they could stay longer! If you have never been on an international SIFAT mission trip, you may not understand the desire to return year after year. On this trip, I saw team members, who usually travel to Ecuador every year, arrive for the first time since the pandemic caused their teams to be postponed in 2020. Their faces lit up, and their hearts were filled by being able to share God's love in practical ways – bending rebar, laying concrete block walls, making VBS crafts and even having an Easter egg hunt in July! They had been waiting to serve others and reconnect with SIFAT's work in Ecuador.

Although I have lost count of the number of teams I have joined in Ecuador, I still get excited to see an upcoming trip on my calendar. And that isn't because my Ecuadorian husband and I are long distance as we go through the immigration process. It is because I get reenergized and reconnected. I see people from different stages of life getting to know one another on a deeper level. They may attend the same church, but often, their paths have not crossed. Now, they have become like family! I experience friends who cannot speak the same language becoming reacquainted, showing one another pictures on their phones and finding ways to communicate. I watch a humble church with few resources reach its community to meet needs. I observe how they know the children in their afterschool programs and want to empower them to become church leaders and break the cycle of poverty in their communities.

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After church, Carrollton (Ga.) FUMC joined Pastor Rafael and Dr. Roberto Contreras, our SIFAT Ecuador director, on the roof of Villaflora's building, built by SIFAT team members.



Clear Lake UMC from Houston, Texas, took the opportunity to stop for photos in front of Cotopaxi on the way to Machachi. Clear Lake's team brought people from several churches

I could keep writing about fun memories from these trips: playing soccer and parachute games with the VBS kids and donkeys, recounting what we saw from the bus windows as we fought Quito's traffic jams, walking across a six-lane highway to a field to take pictures in front of a snow-capped volcano or watching kids practice for an upcoming rodeo-type event by lassoing one another from a horse. I could share the serious stories and visits that brought the reality of living in poverty to the forefront of our minds and tears to our eyes. Instead, I want to close with a blessing that was shared during devotions after a long day of service.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,*

*Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

My prayer today is that *The Blessing of the Hands*, which is attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila who lived in the 1500s, will impact you like it did me. Take time to reflect on our opportunities both here in the USA and internationally. SIFAT strives to be a bridge between the First and Two-thirds Worlds. How will you join us in our mission of *Sharing God's Love in Practical Ways*? Will you become an active member in our SIFAT family like the team members I spent time with this July? We have numerous ways to come alongside our staff members, training graduates and supporters. Pray for our projects and programs, and tell your church or civic organization about SIFAT. Schedule a campus tour this fall, or plan a Learn & Serve retreat for any age group. Join (or lead!) an Ecuador mission team in 2024. Whichever way you choose to get involved, I know you will learn more about showing compassion to the world and being the hands and feet of Jesus! Thank you for being part of our SIFAT family.

