What comes to your mind when you hear the term short-term missions? Is it the sad dirty faces of hungry children; do you picture tiny huts in Africa or Latin America, where pure drinking water is a novelty and food a luxury? Does your heart ache for those who have never heard the amazing news of the Gospel? Or is your initial response to shrug and think, “that’s not for me, someone else will go”, or “I don’t have the money, I have responsibilities here”. Better yet, how do you answer the question Paul sets forth in Romans 10:14, “...and how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

During the first week of August I was blessed to be a part of a group of individuals from North Park Baptist Church, along with several students and professors from NOBTS Birmingham to travel to Puyo, Ecuador. Our team partnered with Pastor Victor and his local church, Agape Baptist, to share the Gospel. Eighteen Americans worked side-by-side with locals in going door-to-door sharing the Good News. Every morning, after a time of prayer and instruction, the team broke into small groups. The groups were made up of a translator, a couple of Americans and several members of Agape Church who would then go out to share the love of Jesus. Although we utilized tools such as the Evangecube in sharing the Gospel, the Biblical knowledge and love of Jesus the members from Agape Church demonstrated.
ECUADOR TRIP CONTINUED...

Stratified came to place their faith in Jesus Christ! In a culture saturated by Catholicism and filled with people who are chained to the ideology of attaining heaven by good works, it was miraculous to see the joy light up the faces of those who came to believe that Jesus Christ is the only way! Did the team encounter rejection? Most assuredly, but praise God that salvation is the Lord’s work and He is always working behind the scenes. Several new believers agreed to participate in a Bible study. We were able to return to their homes to help guide them, provide them with tools on how to study the Bible and explain how faith in Jesus changes your life. Our afternoons were spent helping Pastor Victor with VBS, telling Bible stories, making crafts, and playing crazy games with all of the children. At night we had the opportunity to host a Christian Education class for the local church members, which was led by our very own Dr. Chism as well as having a time to share God’s plan for sexual purity during a youth emphasis service. Despite the busy schedule we moved at the leisurely pace of every Latin American, except for Pastor Victor who never sat down. One evening when the team went out to dinner Pastor Victor was walking around pouring drinks for the entire team. He provided a new definition to the term servant. Any visit to Latin America would be incomplete without a trip to the local ice-cream shop, or in extreme cases a couple of trips a day were necessary for some of the team, who shall remain nameless, and you must not leave without having a taste of the local Ecuadorian delicacy “cuy” or better known in the U.S. as guinea pig. Short-term missions are always full of surprises! Most people go on mission trips to change the lives of others, but inevitably their lives are the ones forever changed. Yes, missions can and should be done daily wherever you are, but God works in special ways when you become increasingly aware of your dependence on Him. Whatever comes to your mind or whatever excuse you find yourself offering next time you hear the term short-term missions, please remember the words of Paul, “how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”

BOOK REVIEW: READING THEOLOGICALLY (2014)

Reading encompasses more than merely interpreting words on a page or screen. Reading is the way we interpret the world around us. Every one of us views the world through a certain lens. This lens is called our “worldview.” As believers in Christ each one of us views the world through the lens of our theology or our what we believe about God. For those called to vocational ministry seminary is a place where our worldview is honed. Seminary is where men and women go to learn how to better read theologically. Yet, reading theologically entails more than merely reading books, articles, and papers on theological topics. Reading theologically involves the way we interpret the world through our own theological lens. In his new book Reading Theologically published by Fortress Press, editor Eric Barreto discusses the importance of seminary students learning how to read theologically. The book is written to young seminarians as they are preparing to study. It serves as a great reminder that seminary is not only a place where we go to reaffirm our theology, but to stretch our theology as we dialogue with people who believe differently. Reading Theologically shares eight areas that challenge seminary students to read basically, meaningfully, biblically, generously, critically, differently, digitally, and spiritually. Each author writes from a different perspective giving the reader a broader view of the Christian world. The chapters on reading generously, critically, and digitally proved to be most helpful. First, as followers of Christ learning to live generously is important. We must be especially generous toward people with whom we disagree. We must be generous while listening to opposing views in order to hear what they are saying. This is the first step towards reaching common ground. Secondly, reading critically is just as important. We cannot read theologically without thinking critically. Thinking critically allows us to read what is being said logically, thereby allowing the reader to determine the value of the material. Third, in the Internet age it is important to read digitally. Digital material is ever growing and will be a major platform for theological resources. Reading digitally, however, forces us to employ critical reading because not everything on the Internet is true. For this reason it is crucially important to check the facts. Personally believe that Reading Theologically should be a required text for every orientation class at all seminaries in America. We live in a culture where the person next door may hold a vastly different worldview. Today it seems that when we disagree with someone we draw battle lines in the sand. However, life does not have to be this way. Reading Theologically serves a reminder that we must learn to dialogue with people with whom we disagree theologically in an effort to better understand one another. The compilation format in which Reading Theologically is written proves to be most helpful. The chapters are written from eight different perspectives including gender, race, and theology. If you are thinking about attending seminary I highly recommend that you read Reading Theologically first.

If you are interested in ordering a copy of Reading Theologically, please visit www.fortresspress.com