



Glimpses of Christmas



Christmas With the Penns

One of our favorite Christmas traditions as a family is cookie baking day. It's not only special because we use recipes handed down or because the treats are delicious, it's truly special because of the friends who join us.

On a Saturday in December, after finals are over, we invite the international students we've met over the course of the fall semester to join us in our home for Christmas baking day. It involves five hours of baking, endless amounts of sugar and butter, and a small kitchen packed with 15-20 students from around the world. The sheer amount of sugar we use in our baking shocks the students! Some students are really into decorating and spend


their time perfecting gingerbread houses and creating the most beautifully iced, sugar cookies. Others love the start to finish process of baking cookies from scratch. Every inch of my kitchen counter is covered in sugar and flour by the end of the day, and our table is covered in delicious treats! The students enjoy sitting around trying the treats they helped create and afterwards packing up some for their roommates.

The students also enjoy walking around our home and looking at all the Christmas decorations. On our Christmas tree there are special ornaments and photos, and they love to ask my kids questions about the meaning of the ornaments. There's also a nativity scene and other symbolic Christmas decorations that allow us to talk about the real meaning of Christmas with these



students who have never heard about the birth of Jesus.

Traditions like this allow us to build relationships with students. It's amazing how conversations naturally happen in the kitchen, while baking together, or at the table while eating together. These moments lay the foundation for more meaningful conversations as the spring semester begins. They allow us to invite students to church with us on Easter Sunday.

I'm so thankful that on a day when the students leave our home covered in flour and sugar, they also leave with a deeper friendship with our family. Hopefully, one day, they will also walk away with a friendship with our Savior. 

About the Penns: Kellie and her husband Tyler, along with their three children, have been serving with IM for five years. They have a unique ministry to international students at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois.

Central Asia Christmas Projects

Nine months ago, my mom became a widow. Writing this fact, makes me cry because now this word is very close to me (not the word but the condition). The mood of cold loneliness, corrosive despair, and freezing weakness—like winter nights when you need something to give warmth and light.

Thank you, dear Free Will beauties, from the inside and deepest part of my heart, for supporting the project WIDOWS for many years. Because, now, I really know what women feel when they lose a part of their lives.

We visited such women with many of you. Some of the living conditions are awful—one room (a bedroom at night, in the daytime a kitchen, living room, and even a shower/bathroom), no food, no light, no heating system—and meat? What is that?

When Free Will Baptists first came to Central Asia, The Hanna Project and a local team went to Tajikistan—a beautiful Persian country in southern Central Asia bordering Afghanistan with 93% of the land covered in mountains. One of the poorest countries in Central Asia, with 50% of its population children and teenagers. Our local Bible Mission team member asked us to visit one family and



give them some food. Life was so difficult at that time—a civil war had just ended, poverty and hunger were everywhere, with no jobs, and no hope.

When we visited, we found four families with eight children living in a one-room house, dragging out their miserable existence. Actually, you can not call them families because they were not. They were living far away from the institution of marriage God created. They were living in a garbage dump. Stinky and ugly. And, their lives were full of garbage. We shared the gospel with them and gave them food.

One of the kids, a girl named Zhenya, started coming to the House of Prayer (local church) just to get food. Later, she

got married and disappeared, without accepting Jesus Christ. (Sometimes it takes years for people in Central Asia to accept the gospel and believe it.) Her life got worse and worse. She divorced, remarried, and it seemed her life would change. And it did! Zhenya's husband died. She decided to come to the church to look for consolation and relief. She *knew* where to get help. She got it from the Lord!

Yes, she is a widow with three little children. But now she is His daughter. God takes care of her through people like you. You deliver coal for cold houses or heaters where there are no ovens, food, and medicine, which is extremely expensive. You brought warm words from God that He loves and cares like those warm blankets.

Zhenya, the girl from the garbage grew up, sipped grief, accepted Jesus Christ, and now serves the Lord and her family. Thank you that we, together with you, came to that family and brought the light and warmth needed during the cold winter season of life. **IV**

View this video from Bible Mission for real stories from widows in Central Asia:

<https://rb.gy/acc566>



Christmas in a Cattle Stall



For many years, the sisters of Free Will Baptists have been supporting the ministry called “Joy of Christmas” in Central Asia—in countries where Islam is the predominate religion (over 90% of the population). But Central Asia is also a place where God is acting today. He is calling people from the nations of Central Asia to living faith in Jesus Christ.

Christmas is the perfect time to reach out to families—not only by giving children wonderful Christmas gifts, but also by giving the Word of God to the entire family. In many places, we were allowed to see and continue to see God’s blessing Hand on this ministry.

I want to share about the nation of the Uyghurs living in Kazakhstan, close to the Chinese border.

In 2007 God touched the heart of Bible Mission and several local churches, with the need to serve among the Uyghurs (an ethnic community living in Kazakhstan close to

the Chinese border) and take the Gospel to them. Ten years passed, but there was almost no evident results. In 2017 God opened new doors to the Uyghurs and revealed new opportunities.

One of these doors was a family living in the village of Charyn. Masha is a Russian lady, and Abdullah is her Uyghurian husband. Masha is a faithful believer, almost the only one in her region, and Abdullah had started reading the Bible. God lead us to this family, who lived in poverty in one little room. But they had a big heart. When they heard about organizing a Christmas outreach program for the kids of their village, they immediately opened their home. When they saw the crowd of kids “flooding” their front yard, they realized their little room—kitchen, living room, and sleeping room all in one—would not be big enough for one tenth of these kids.

It was the first Christmas event we organized for




Uyghurian kids in the winter of 2018-2019. A freezing wind was blowing from the deserts of Kazakhstan, so there was no way to have the Christmas program in the yard. God acted through a team of young people from Almaty who had come to help (under the leadership of Luba Kudratova). He gave Masha, Abdullah, and the youth team a bright idea. Masha and Abdullah had a small cattle shed they used as a winter shelter for the sheep, cows, calves, and donkey. They decided to celebrate the first Christmas in this Muslim village in the cattle shed!

What a wonderful celebration it was! If you had seen the

joy in the eyes of those kids when they left the cattle shed, each embracing their very own Christmas gift box complete with a family-time Bible!

Yes, the setting of this Christmas event had been so different from what we are used to—with the straw-covered floor in the cattle barn with sheep and cows around. But nothing compared to the “Joy of Christmas” we were allowed to share with these kids for the very first time in their lives.

This was not our last visit to Charyn, to Masha and Abdullah. We continue visiting them, watering and cultivating the seed of the gospel planted in the hearts of children and adults. 

About the Writers: Luba K. works with Bible Mission in Kazakhstan.

Paul Hagelgans, Bible Mission field director, was born in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and later moved to Germany. His father was a deacon of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church, and although the Communistic government prohibited teaching children about God, Paul could hear the Bible stories and learned how to pray. At age 14, he made Jesus the Lord of his life. At 17, he answered the call to preach. He has served in various positions at Bible Mission since 1993. Paul is married to Katharina, and they have three children and three grandsons.



Christmas Opportunities



Tis the Season for Giving!

by Jody Sullivan,
West Virginia WAC President

People who live in Appalachia "are very close to nature and have a deeply held belief in God. They are friendly, kind and helpful to one another, taking care of the needs of others...(They) also have a strong sense of what is right and what ought to be." (Appalachian Culture/awolnews.

weebly.com) We take God's Word seriously. We believe the Bible is our guide for how to live and treat our neighbors each day.


The ladies at Prince of Peace Free Will Baptist church know that anything we do for those in need is given as unto the Lord. With this in mind, not only do we support missionaries monthly, we also support local ministries and non-profit organizations, showing ourselves to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

One of the newest projects is to providing gifts for Operation Soldier Care. Our WAC is working in conjunction with WEMM-FM 107.9 Christian radio in Huntington, West Virginia, and providing needed items for deployed military. We chose to collect toothbrushes, tooth paste, and lip balm. These items will be taken to Military Missions in Lexington, Kentucky, where they will be packed and shipped to the soldiers serving overseas.

A second new project we've adopted is providing various items for Lily's Place, a Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Center for drug-addicted, newborn babies. Sadly, Huntington is a major hub in the drug trade. So many addicted babies are born in this area born that the

hospital has created a special nursery for them. On any given day the unit averages 40 babies in that nursery. Unwanted babies are transferred to Lily's Place and placed in the rehab program. We have provided garbage bags, baby wipes, paper towels, and Walmart and Kroger gift cards to cover other needs. While we are making a difference in their live, those precious babies will never know who provided for them—but the Lord knows.

At our annual WAC Christmas party, the ladies bring personal hygiene items for the homeless and low-income families in the Huntington area. We provide items that cannot be purchased with a food card. In the last several years, one of the ladies has crocheted lap throws. This year, 60 throws were distributed to those who had been out in the cold for two hours. These folks truly depend upon the kindness of strangers.

Opportunities surround us if you will just look. Ask the Lord to show your WAC various ways to become the hands and feet of Christ. You'll be surprised at what you might find to do! 





🎄 Christmas in Uganda 🎄



All I want for Christmas is...

What happens when you allow your children to fill in that simple phrase? Do immediate images of dollar signs begin to flash through your mind? Been there, done that.

I have spent the past three Christmases in Jinja, Uganda, my mission home. Christmas is entirely different in a land that values community and family. No gifts, no tree, none of the frills we think we need. Christmas is a time for families to gather in their home villages and spend time with each other, cooking and singing and visiting. Churches are generally open to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Shops are closed for the week so workers can spend time with family. If it is at all possible, people go “home.”

For the past two years, I have hosted a Christmas party for the kids we help in a slum area of Jinja called Works Village. On a typical day we have between 60 and 75 kids for classroom study. We have become family there. Many of these kids can't return to the village of their extended families due to the excessive cost of transport. They spend Christmas as if it is just another normal day. That is why we wanted to make this day extra special for them. The party was

open to anyone in the community, so our normal 75 grew to over 300.

The kids love to do dramas. The first year they acted out the nativity story all on their own, and did a fabulous job. No costumes, no props—just kids and the Word. How funny it was to see some of our younger kids acting as sheep, bouncing all over the performing area! Then they sang “Joy to the World” in English. I still watch the video of their singing when I begin to miss them. The day included Scripture memorization, and traditional singing and dance. It was their day to be kids.


The highlight of the day was the meal. We had the traditional food of rice, posho (maize flour/cornmeal cooked with water to a dough-like consistency) and beans.



But, we wanted to give the kids something to make this day extra special.

If I should allow these kids to fill in the phrase, *All I want for Christmas is _____*, it would not be toys, electronics, brand-name clothes, bikes, or whatever else a child from the West wants. The greatest request, by far, would be meat for their

meal—something they never get in their normal daily life. Both years, I bought a goat, and the children had meat with their meal. They love cake as well, so we had cake. A ten-inch cake fed 300 kids last year. (All they want is a small taste.)

Christmas seems real there, even amidst the poverty and deplorable living conditions. They have not forgotten what it is all about—spending time with family and worshipping the One on Whom this day is centered—JESUS. 

About the Writer: Bobby Bowen served as secretary-treasurer of West Virginia WAC for 14 years. She was also the collection center coordinator for the West Virginia/Kentucky/Ohio area for Operation Christmas Child for 13 years. For over ten years, Bobby was deeply involved with street ministry in Huntington, West Virginia. She was commissioned by Global Outreach International in Tupelo, Mississippi, in June, 2017, and has served as full-time missionary in Uganda since October, 2017. She is now on extended pandemic furlough but is overseeing hunger relief and food distribution programs in Uganda from the United States.

At the time of this publication, a new landowner tore down the entire village where Bobby served, displacing at least 3,000 people. They are now running five feeding programs in different parts of the city for those displaced and out of work. Bobby said, “I am busier now than I was in Uganda.”

