
Gifts of Grace

Second Edition

December 2016



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A Glimpse of Christmas

by Libby Myers

On September 25th it looks like Christmas for the Gifts of Grace Ministries! What a beautiful sight to see all those Christmas gifts for the children in Lithuania ready to be shipped and then distributed in December. God has given us an amazing opportunity to be a part of. I want to give you a little glimpse of what it's like to go into the homes of the children, the help centers, the Birzai church and the Vilnius church, the orphanage, the handicap center and the nursing homes.

Going into a home is a very humbling experience, as the families are very happy that Santa has arrived from "Laplandia"! You try not to notice that there is very little light and heat, but then you see a beautiful tree they have cut from the forest and decorated and the conversation goes to how lovely it is. Then they offer you tea or coffee and other refreshments and sometimes even an entire meal. You're like WOW how can this be, all the time the kids are patiently waiting for their gifts. Then the child comes over to Santa and before they receive their gift the child recites a poem to Santa and off they go to open their gift. Usually they wait for their other siblings to receive their gifts before they begin to open theirs. Then the fun begins and the children all begin very meticulously to open their gift not to tear the paper and they are equally as careful with every item in the box. They take time to look at each item and show it to their Mom and siblings and everybody is happy for each other. It's amazing to watch their eyes shine and their faces turn into one big smile, especially when they say "this is what I had wished for"! Oh how many times I have heard those words, what a blessing you all are!

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Then there are the three centers and the church, it's a bit different because the children have prepared amazing Christmas programs for us and their parents and loved ones. It's like being at church when we watch our children in the Christmas plays somewhat, as there's lots of singing and dancing and some are very theatrical. They put all their hearts into these programs. Afterwards, Santa arrives and the poems begin, the children receive their gifts and then we have a party with all kinds of food that everyone has brought from their homes. We don't always get to see these kids open their gifts, but the next day we see as they all come in wearing new clothes, backpacks, hats, jewelry, etc. They are so happy you can feel the happiness in the air!

The Handicap center is a favorite place of mine as my heart is always so filled with joy to be with these lovely folks. They have such huge hearts and they love so easy! Here they always sing and dance for us and then they have us to dance with them. Then they give us some type of beautiful art work they have made themselves, from pottery to origami to knitted items and it is amazing work. We always give them a small present, but nothing equal to what they give us through their beautiful music and many smiles and hugs!

The Orphanage is quite different as you can imagine, as there are no parents or other family members to be with them and watch their special programs. This part is heartbreaking, but they do have the workers who love and care for them on a daily basis. The workers of the orphanage are amazing loving people who give their hearts to these children every day. These children, like all children, are equally excited to see Santa and receive Christmas gifts and share their sweet poems of tradition in Lithuania. This is a place you leave with a happy and sad heart in hopes that one day they will all have a loving family to go home to.

Last but certainly not least is the lovely folks at the nursing home. Here we talk with the folks and share the Christmas story. Sometimes we sing songs together and of course we have some small gifts for them. I think the one thing they are the most excited about are the home baked buns we take from the Gifts of Grace Center Bakery for them. They love them! And this is when you always see a smile on their faces.

So, this is Christmas not only for them, but for us who have been graced with God's presence through each person we meet while in Lithuania. Gifts of Grace wants you to know that you are blessing these children and adults with God's Grace through preparing a box, making a donation and through your prayers. You are on this mission together with us and you have answered the call to serve those whom you have never met and are in need. May God Bless you for being good and faithful servants and may God bless these children with love and happy hearts.

Merry Christmas,
Libby

Aldona's Paradise

by Renee Hayes



This summer I made my fourth trek to the Birzai region of Lithuania as a part of the Gifts of Grace building team and, as on each previous trip, each day held countless blessings. One day that stands out occurred near the end of our stay when we were doing last minute souvenir hunting for loved ones back home. Next to a small shop in Pabirze, Libby noticed a familiar house that she remembered visiting on her first trip to Lithuania many years before.

As she was speculating about the elderly lady whom she had met in 2004, around the corner of the house walks Aldona, calling out to us and motioning for us to come inside the gate. She spoke

no English, and none of us were fluent in Lithuanian. But we spent nearly an hour in her beautifully hand-tended gardens, admiring the fruits of her labors and relying on Google Translate to converse with her.

A former 4th-grade teacher, she lives alone and created these beautiful flower and water gardens herself. While there may have been gaps in our understanding of each other's words, her kindness and hospitality were evident. We were blessed beyond words by her willingness to spend the afternoon entertaining strangers' questions.

Pastor Tim said before we left, "This must be what heaven is like!" And I agree.





Summer Work Team

Summer 2016 was filled with lots of hard work and tons of blessings! We had two main projects to fill our time this summer. Our first project was spent at our dear friend Nijole's house. A few years, the first Gifts of Grace summer mission team provided running water to Nijole's and through the years we have been honored to make improvements to their home. This year we installed a new kitchen sink and cabinet and refurbished the kitchen floor. We also installed new flooring in their front room. One great thing about working at Nijole's house is that they always work with us and often treat us to some of the most delicious food you could imagine!

Our second project this summer was working with a new family. Svetlana is a single mom caring for six children ranging in age from two to eighteen. The house into which they had recently moved was in desperate need of repairs. There were holes in the walls, bare electrical wires within easy reach, and a decrepit, rusted-out radiator heating system. We were able to repair the walls, install new lights, switches, receptacles and paint the two bedrooms that accommodate the six children. With the aid of Raimondas, Ramunas, and Rosanda, our yearly Lithuanian helpers, we also removed the old radiator system and reinforced and repaired the leaky portion of their roof. Having such great friends in a foreign land really makes the hard work seem so easy!

As is becoming a tradition, we were fortunate enough to spend time at the orphanage and the "old folks home". Andrus Kask travelled with us to proclaim the good news and to share in some traditional Russian and Lithuanian songs!

Bakery Update

Additions to the bakery out at Pačeriaukštė are coming along nicely and it is progressing closer to being a retail bakery. This has been a dream of the Gifts of Grace center since it was purchased. With the help of friends from around the globe we have been able to replace the roof and install a new furnace. The new roof matches the help center and makes the bakery look completely different! The new furnace system was built to accommodate future additions to the bakery. It is the hope of the workers to build on a seating area one day.

Our next project will be to install a bathroom and make sure all other aspects of the building are up to code. Once the updates are completed, the help center should be able to sell their delicious baked goods to the public in addition to providing all Pagalbos Centras with food.

The New Roof



The New Furnace System



Ongoing Support

As always, the programs we provide and the work we are able to do would not be possible without the continuous support of those who want to spread the love of Christ. The entire Gifts of Grace team wants to thank everyone that has shared their generosity through the Christmas Box Ministry, the Sponsorship Program, and monetary donations. Your prayers for our ministry and for the people of Lithuania are felt each and every day.

If you would like more information about any of our projects please visit our website: www.giftsofgrace.us If you would like to be involved in the Sponsorship Program or travel with us on one of the work teams feel free to call or email.

Donations are also graciously accepted to help with building projects, sponsorships, and shipping costs for the Christmas box ministry. Just click the "donations" link on our website or go to giftsofgrace.us/donate/donate.html