



Dear Praying Friends,

Merry Christmas!!

Thank you so much for standing with us through your prayers and/or financial investments in 2008! We know it has been an especially difficult year for many of you, and your sacrifice has not gone un-noticed nor unappreciated (by us or by the Lord).

On the family side of things, the big news is that as of this past weekend **our daughter Kendra is engaged to be married to Steve Sirinides!** The date has yet to be set, but they are looking at June 2009. We are very pleased as Steve is a fine follower of Jesus, and his family has been on our team in Athens for many years (and we are all close). Hope you can see the attached photo, taken on the engagement day.

The Athens Christmas Outreach this year included 5 components: **1.** Language-specific meals (one for Arabic-speakers, and two for Farsi speakers), **2.** A special holiday celebration at the Persian Christian Fellowship, **3.** Special gifts in the meal bags at the last Tea House before Christmas break, **4.** A special Christmas party for the men who stay in our shelter (The Nest), **5.** Inviting refugee friends for a meal in our homes.

Jesus was proclaimed and demonstrated. Relationships were started or deepened. Conversations were generated and questions were answered. People used to rejection and despair were treated with dignity and given hope. Thank you so much to all who prayed and/or invested in these efforts to make Jesus visible to those who have a hard time seeing Him.

If you want to read more about the last Tea House and the Nest party, you can read Susan Pearson's edited excerpts below.

If you want to read more about the Christmas banquets, you can read Themis Sirinides' edited summary.

As for us, **last night our Iraqi brothers "M" and "A", and our dear Sudanese friend Mr. Ali joined our family** (along with our teammate Ilir) for a meal, a reading of the Christmas story from the Bible, some songs, a game, prayers expressing why we love Jesus, and a gift exchange. Unfortunately, we failed to take good pictures! :/ Afterward, "M" and "A" went with me to the Christmas Eve service at St. Andrew's International Church.

We hope and pray that 2009 will see you experiencing more of the active presence of the Lord in your life. God bless you as you continue to work and live for the advancement of His Kingdom among the nations!

Grateful,

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<http://elliebomccracken.blogspot.com> (Ellie's ADOPTION blog) <http://refminathens.blogspot.com>
(some refugee stories)

<http://www.vimeo.com/1207537> (VIDEO)

THE LAST TEA HOUSE 2008

Saturday was our last Tea House of the year and the last one before Christmas. Every year, we try to do a little something extra in the food bags at Christmas and this year was no different. This year, over 800 refugees received a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste (thanks go to Woodvale Church in Canada and their short term team), a candy cane (thanks go to a local volunteer, Theresa), and a pair of mittens (thanks go to you). The smiles on the faces and surprise to be receiving something extra was really quite nice. I was also handing out photographs to the folks who had come to our Christmas banquets the week before and they were all so grateful to have a family photo. One young man asked what he should do with it and I said jokingly, "Send it to your mother!" He responded that his mother hadn't seen him for over 12 years and I said, "All the more reason to send it to her. She would love it as a Christmas present." And the refugee man, said, "Yes. I think I will. She is old. This will make her happy." Never underestimate the power of a photograph...

THE NEST

...this year, we wanted to do something for the gentlemen that are staying in our NEST (temporary domicile for creatures of flight ... or the more official description:

"The Nest provides structured support, accountability, and a safe environment for spiritual formation. Residents of the Nest, roughly a dozen men at any given time, are given a 3-6 month stay during which they make preparation for independent living and are active in helping with the various ministries at the ARC. Nest residents include both new believers and seekers.")

We have 14 guys staying at the NEST at the moment and they were a tremendous help during the Christmas banquets ... translating, table hosting, cooking, etc. And we wanted to give them their own special Christmas party. So, we ordered some roasted chickens, teammates brought veggies, bread, dessert, potatoes, and everything else we could think of to make a Christmas meal, and had a Christmas dinner at the NEST. The guys were so excited. It was their chance to offer hospitality (even though they were not cooking) and have a party in 'their home'. They were given the task of decorating a tree (we gave them the tree and decorations from our supply) and setting up the seating for 30 people (they got tables and chairs from the ARC) and we did the rest...Because I was going to be in Scotland, I helped with the buying of Christmas presents and wrapping them on Saturday to go under their Christmas tree. There was dinner, some music, opening of presents, and a movie. For many of these guys it is their first Christmas as Christians and they see us as their family.

CHRISTMAS BANQUETS - 2008

Despite the riots, almost 300 people came to the Christmas Outreach Dinners last week. We had an Arabic and two Farsi nights. The air was heavy with tear gas and we could hear the commotion going on a few blocks from the ARC.

In spite of all this our guests enjoyed themselves while they laughed at the games, watched a puppet show, shared a meal and heard about Immanuel – God with us. At the end of the message Nader asked if anyone wanted to receive a gift from God, and offered a New Testament. It was a slow start, but one man raised his hand and then another and another and by the end over sixty Bibles were handed out (to Muslims who really wanted them)! (I hope you can see the attached photo).

Please continue to pray for God's work here in Athens. Please also pray for Adam from Sudan (I mentioned him in past emails). I saw him today and he asked to see me this week to discuss some questions that he has from the Bible.