

Subj: **Athens Christmas Outreach, and Angry About X-mas?**
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Dear Praying Friends,

Thank you so very much for all the ways you have invested in our life and ministry this year. There wouldn't be a team "here" if there weren't a team "there". We wish you all a Merry Christmas and pray that 2007 will bring more of the active presence of God in your lives!

A thousand thanks to those who prayed and/or financially invested in our 2006 Athens Christmas Outreach. As I mentioned in October, this year we sensed the Lord was leading us to emphasize the following "guidelines" in this year's outreach: "More for Less", "Less Is More", and "Long-term vs. Short-term". We believed that this included an emphasis on sharing Christmas, NOT with as many people as possible, but with refugees with whom we already had some level of "relationship". Although I did not mention a specific total amount that we were projecting for this year's budget, we were hoping to raise \$25,000 USD.

I am happy to report that the team unanimously agreed that this was one of, if not THE, best Christmas Outreach experience we have had! All the money we needed (and more) was provided, and the local donations of toys and clothing were better and more generous than EVER! Between our 4 primary programs, we invited about 375 people, (most of whom came). They were all blessed and heard the Gospel!

1. We sponsored a Christmas party for the children who had been to our Summer Kids Camp (this year and last year) that included food, crafts, games, the Christmas story, bell-playing, singing, gifts, and Illusionist Bob Hill's Gospel presentation (which was excellent and had the kids--and their parents--"spell-bound"). NEVER before did everyone pay as close attention to the program as this time!
2. We sponsored 3 different Christmas dinners--two for Arabic-speaking and English-speaking refugees, and one for Farsi-speaking refugees. The excellent meals were prepared by refugees, evangelistic messages were given in their own languages, testimonies were shared, relationships were deepened that opened up more meaningful conversations following the dinners, and gifts were distributed that included backpacks, rain ponchos, toys, and New Testaments. (We had originally planned to include sleeping bags, but decided to NOT wait until December so we could start distributing them in October. So far we have given out about 500).

NEVER before did so many pay as close attention to the program as this year! The refugees were profuse in their expressions of gratitude, offering comments such as, "Thank you for remembering us", "We can't believe that you would do something as special as this for us", "This gift was just what I needed", "The gift of yourselves is the most important gift to us", etc.

NEVER before has "crowd control" gone as smoothly as this year. We had a great team helping us from Illinois, great local volunteers (Greeks and internationals), great unity among our teammates, with great leadership from Kate Cami and Susan Pearson.

3. We had "family-style" celebrations in homes with our refugee friends (singles and families). A warm informal family atmosphere, Christmas

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traditions and explanations, food and gifts all contributed to helping our friends feel and experience the "Word made flesh" in a more personally impacting way. Mr. Ali and Mustafa spent Christmas Eve with our family, and we all had a great time. They both expressed how the thing they miss the very most in Greece is their families, and how much something like this means to them when we invite them to join ours.

You can be sure that your investments have been used by God for furthering His Kingdom among the nations, and we will keep you updated in the days to come of the dividends that God will bring forth.

God bless you all! We appreciate you so much and thank God for your vital role in our life and ministry.

Grateful,

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Web pages:

www.ITRefMin.org (click "Teams", then click "Athens")

www.iteams.org

<http://refminathens.blogspot.com> (some refugee stories)

www.geocities.com/scripturecalligraphy (purchase beautiful art and support our teammates)

www.helpinghands.gr/en/default.htm

www.helpinghands.watchmyshow.info

www.myspace.com/smccracken730

Our ministry is striving to be a FULL-SERVICE station on this exit ramp of the Refugee Highway by partnering with churches to offer practical services which demonstrate the love of God for the refugee as a whole person, and which invite the refugee to be a part of advancing His kingdom among the nations.