

Ukraine: More than a new pair of shoes

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I have always had a special love and passion for children. When I first heard about a mission trip to Ukraine, I immediately felt called to go. I saw no better way to spend my Christmas break than to share Jesus with orphans.

This was my first time to travel overseas. I had no idea what to expect. During my 13-plus- hour plane ride to Ukraine, I tried to picture what exactly it would be like. It was nothing like I imagined.

Our first morning in Ukraine, we drove about four hours on torn-apart roads to Kherson. That day was spent going through hundreds of boxes with brand-new winter shoes, socks, Bibles and hand-knitted hats.



The rest of our time in both Kherson and Odessa was spent working in several orphanages, fitting children for new shoes and sharing the gospel with them. We used a gospel bracelet that had a gold bead representing heaven and a black bead representing sin that prevents us from going to heaven. A red bead represented the blood of Jesus, who died on a cross so that we may have a relationship with God and enter into his kingdom. A white bead represented purity, because thanks to what Jesus did, we are now able to be made pure. The final bead was green. The children learned if you believe and accept Jesus into your heart, then you should spend time

growing in your relationship with him.

At first, a pastor made the gospel presentations. After we watched him a few times, he asked team members to volunteer to present the gospel through an interpreter. There was a day that I took that step and shared the Good News with the children. I am so thankful to have had that opportunity. I asked every child to repeat the prayer to accept Jesus. Whether they all meant it in their heart or not is not for me to know, but I am honored to have been used by the Holy Spirit to at least plant seeds in the lives of the children.

Going on this trip was very eye-opening for me. It's one thing to hear how blessed you really are, but it is another to experience how others live. The conditions in these orphanages was very depressing. I wish I could do so much more than provide them winter clothes, but I was able to share with them the greatest gift of all, Jesus.

At one orphanage, we were unable to get our truck to it due to the trees. This was just another example to show that even without new shoes, they were still able to hear about the greatest gift of all. It was very sad walking into that orphanage seeing the children lined up with old shoes already off and prepared for new ones. I did not walk out of that orphanage with any regret though, knowing that they now knew about a Savior who is greater than any new shoe they could ever receive.

I am so thankful for the team I worked with, the translators and everyone who helped us do God's work in Ukraine. During my time there, around 35 orphanages were reached and around 4,000 children were able to hear about Jesus. This was not only a life-changing event for me to experience, but also for the children who now personally know Jesus as Savior.

Candace Hall, a student at the University of Texas at Arlington, served in Ukraine with Go Now Missions, working in partnership with Children's

Emergency Relief International.