

Christmas story changes life of refugee

Each year when Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel Lita and Rick Sample reflect on the Christmas story, they remember one very special Christmas, when a refugee family heard the story of Jesus Christ for the first time.

It was December, and a new refugee family had just arrived in Fremont, Calif., from Afghanistan. They had nothing — no furniture, no towels, no dishes. After meeting the family, Rick contacted CBF partner Crossroads Church in Fremont and asked if the church would host a Christmas party for the family. The church agreed, and at the party, the family received clothes, pillows, blankets and other basic items to start their new life in the United States.

During the party, someone read about the birth of Jesus from the gospel of Matthew, and then gave the New Testament to the family as a gift. It became the most important gift the family received.

Each night the mother and father took turns reading the New Testament out loud to their three children. Soon, they asked for the entire Bible because they had finished the New Testament. By Valentine's Day, they had read the Bible through two times and told the Samples they were ready to become followers of Christ.

"The power of God's word had touched their hearts," Rick said.

Since 2002, the Samples have been serving in Fremont, where they minister among refugees and immigrants. For many

years, they have focused on helping refugees from Afghanistan, who have resettled in the United States due to violence and conflict in their home country. Now, the Samples also minister among Karen refugees, who began relocating to the United States several years ago following decades of violence in refugee camps along Thailand's border with Burma/Myanmar.

This summer nearly 40 adults and children from CBF partner Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., traveled to Fremont to join the Samples in ministry. They sponsored special gatherings in a local park for Afghan refugees and also for Karen refugees. Church members were able to fellowship with refugees, build rela-

tionships and offer hospitality to individuals and families who often feel overlooked and lonely.

The team experienced what's at the heart of the Samples' ministry — being the presence of Christ. And because refugees and immigrants are part of many communities across the United States, churches and Christians have daily opportunities to share the love of Christ with people from around the world.

"If anybody had a time and opportunity to reach out to refugees and really show them Christ's love through selfless friendship, then this is that time," Lita said.

By Carla Wynn Davis, CBF Communications

Mountain Brook Baptist church members, such as Sandy Ballard, left, traveled to California to minister to refugees and immigrants. Church members sponsored local festivals and built relationships with people from Afghanistan and Thailand.



Photo courtesy MBBC

SERVE If you are interested in serving alongside the Samples in California, contact Chris Boltin at engage@thefellowship.info or (800) 352-8741 to learn about opportunities.

Watch videos about the Samples' ministry to refugees on CBF's YouTube Channel — www.youtube.com/cbfvideo.

