

HOW CAN WE FEED SO MANY?

As Relief Society president, I felt overwhelmed by the needs and challenges some families in our little branch were facing. Times had been tough, and several members had lost their jobs.

Outside the Church, discouragement, sadness, and hopelessness could be seen in the eyes of many who were having difficulty providing for their families. Even children and youth exuded feelings of uncertainty and turmoil.

Branch leaders felt the need to carry a bit of hope and love to the most needy—something that could help people in our community feel that a loving Heavenly Father knew of their

trials and was watching over them.

As Christmas drew near, we proposed inviting the poorest children in our community to a dinner. Branch members would hold fund-raisers, buy food from a fast-food chain, and prepare our meetinghouse to receive our guests. Everyone got involved, including the Primary children, young women, and young men.

We arranged for the fast-food chain to provide the food, and we contacted social workers to locate families with the greatest needs. The workers gave us a list of about 100 children, which was more than we had anticipated. Our spirits did not fail, but it seemed impossible to raise

enough money to purchase food for that many children.

When the day of our dinner arrived, the branch president, accompanied by several deacons, took the funds we had raised and headed to the restaurant, wondering how we were going to feed so many children with our limited funds. They prayed as they went, thinking that maybe we should invite only the smallest children, divide the meals in half, or call off the activity.

When they reached the restaurant, the branch president put the money on the counter. That's when their prayers were answered.

The restaurant manager looked at them and, with a smile, said the restaurant would be happy to contribute as many meals as necessary—at no cost! I cannot express the joy we all felt upon learning of this kind gesture, which allowed us to bring some cheer—and plenty of food—to a large group of needy children.

Thanks to the restaurant's generosity, we were able to use the money that we had raised to purchase food and make food baskets for the neediest families.

From this experience we learned that no effort is in vain when we put our talents and good desires to the service of our fellow beings. Our testimonies were strengthened that the Lord opens doors after we do all we can. ■
Marta Fernández-Rebollos, Spain

As the branch president put the money on the counter, their prayers were answered.



I HOPE SOMEONE WILL LOVE HER

When my son was three years old and my daughter was four, they were part of a neighborhood preschool group. That winter those of us in charge of the group decided to do a Christmas project that included having each child donate a toy to a needy family.

We taught many lessons in the preceding weeks about how gratitude and sharing with others make us happy. I told my children to start thinking about which toys they would like to give, wanting them to have the experience of choosing what to give. Our family finances were limited, and I was curious which of their few toys they would be willing to part with.

One Saturday morning I told the children it was time to select their donation. I helped Hunter wrap the truck he had chosen and then went to see how Mikelle was doing. The scene I witnessed from the doorway of her room brought tears to my eyes.

Mikelle was holding her favorite doll, Mella, dressed in her best doll clothing, and she was singing to her. Then she tucked a small blanket into the bottom of a gift bag. She smiled at the doll, hugged and kissed her, and lovingly placed her in the bag. Seeing me, she said, "Mella's all ready, Mom. I hope someone will love her."

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Knowing how my daughter felt about this doll, I was stunned she was giving her away. I almost wanted to tell Mikelle she didn't have to give up her favorite doll, but I stopped myself.

"She understands giving," I thought. "She is giving her very best."

Suddenly I recognized that part of me was willing to give and share but not at too great a personal sacrifice. I had placed limits on my charity, and I knew I needed to change.

I thought of how Heavenly Father gave up His only perfect Son and allowed Him to suffer and die for me. I pictured a loving Father in Heaven kissing His Beloved Son and sending

Him to earth as a baby, hoping that we would love and follow Him.

The Savior Himself held nothing back and gave everything He had to give.

I wondered if Mikelle would change her mind before the Christmas program, when the toys were to be donated, but she did not. I wondered if she would later regret her choice and feel sad, but she did not.

Seeing my daughter's Christlike example, I decided that whether I have much or little to give, I would always cheerfully give my best when I have an opportunity to share. ■

Brittney Pyne, Utah, USA

YOU SANG FROM YOUR HEARTS

In December 2000 our stake choir was preparing to host a choral festival. Several choirs of great renown in the city of Posadas, Argentina, had confirmed that they would be participating, and many people would be attending. Through our singing we hoped to share our testimony of the birth of the Savior.

As the choir director, I was a bit anxious. Adding to my anxiety was that I was eight months pregnant with twins. I experienced pains during our final rehearsal a week before the concert and had to conduct sitting down.

By the time the rehearsal ended, I could no longer stand. My husband, Carlos, and my father gave me a blessing. Carlos then took me to the hospital, where doctors determined that the babies would arrive that day. I was fearful, but Carlos told me to trust in the Lord.

Soon the cry of a newborn baby flooded the room. My heart leapt for joy at the sound, but then the doctor drew close and said, “That is Kira crying, but Abril did not make it.”

I have no words to describe the feelings that swept over me. Soon I was moved to another room, where my husband was waiting for me. We embraced and wept.

“Dafne, we don’t know the Lord’s purpose in taking Abril to Himself,” Carlos said. “But we must be strong, accept His will, and move forward in faith.”

A little while later, Carlos held Kira’s tiny body and blessed her to live. She did, but because of complications, she remained in the hospital for the next 10 days.

I was released the following week. Because of frequent trips to the hospital to see and feed Kira, I gave no thought to the choir. The night before the festival, my father asked me if I had decided whether to conduct. “Pray about it, Dafne,” he said, “and surely whatever decision you make will be the right one.”

I thought about Kira, who still lay

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in the hospital. I thought about the choir members, who had worked hard to prepare for the concert. I thought about the Savior and His birth, life, and sacrifice. I knew what I needed to do.

The demonstrations of love our family received the next evening from choir members moved us deeply, and the spirit of harmony among them created a heartfelt desire to touch those who attended.

Because we hosted the festival, our stake choir sang last. When the piano and violin played the introduction to “The First Noel,” tears spilled onto my cheeks. Then, as the voices melded with the instruments, I was overcome with the sensation that I was in a beautiful place.

When we finished, I turned around to see that most audience members had tears in their eyes. People who perhaps had never heard the gospel’s message of peace and love had felt through our music the beauty and wonder of the birth of the Son of God.

Afterward, the director of one of the other choirs said to us, “We had good technique, but you sang from your hearts.”

On Christmas Eve my husband and I thanked God for sending Kira to our home and for sending His Son to earth. Because of the Son’s Atonement and our sealing in the temple, we know that Abril will someday be ours again. ■

Dafne Analia Romero de Tau, Misiones, Argentina

POPCORN, PIONEERS, AND PEACE

Mom put bricks in the oven and then wrapped them in blankets so our feet would stay warm as we traveled in our car without a heater. It was 1935, and we were making the 60-mile (96 km) drive from Salt Lake City to Payson, Utah, to visit my grandparents in early December. The snow was falling lightly around us and swirled in what looked like little tornadoes on the road ahead. My big brother, Fred, and I were bundled in heavy coats and itchy wool socks and mufflers. The drive seemed endless to me as a seven-year-old.

We made this trip every December. The Christmas season didn't really start until we were in Grandma and Grandpa Tanner's warm kitchen making popcorn balls. Grandpa would stoke up the fire, and Grandma would fill a wire basket with popcorn and shake it vigorously over the fire until it filled with puffy, white corn. Then Grandma would pour hot honey butter over the popcorn in a big cast-iron kettle and mix in peanuts. When the mixture cooled, we would dig in with our butter-covered hands and make festive balls to share with family and friends.

This Christmas, however, would be different. Usually Fred and I rode in the backseat, but this year we were wedged between

my parents on the bench seat up front. A small white coffin carrying the body of my one-year-old brother, Gerold, took up the backseat. A case of measles had turned into pneumonia and snuffed out his young life. Earlier we had gone to the mortuary to pick up the small wooden coffin.

As we made the two-hour journey, Dad led us in singing Christmas songs. Mom and Dad harmonized, and the beautiful music comforted us as we grieved the loss of our baby.

When we got to Grandpa's house, the usually jovial crowd of family and relatives was waiting solemnly. The coffin was taken from the backseat and brought into Grandma's spotless parlor. My grandparents' bishop spoke a few kind words, and then we were back in the car to ride to the cemetery, where we all wept as this precious little boy was laid in the frozen ground.

Christmas did come. The fire was

stoked, the popcorn was popped, and the festive popcorn balls were delivered on Grandpa's horse-drawn sleigh. There was sadness that day but also a resonant peace as I listened to my faithful grandparents reading the story of Christ's birth.

My grandparents had been born of pioneer parents who had laid many babies in the ground. As our family mourned our loss, we turned to where our ancestors had turned—to the Son of God and His words. I remembered the Christmas story with a different heart that year, for it was because of the baby born in a manger that the baby we had laid in the ground would rise again and be ours.

Many decades have passed since then, but each Christmas I still pour honey butter over popcorn, mix in peanuts, shape the mixture into balls, and remember. ■

Shirlee Hurst Shields, Utah, USA

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