

Get Involved: Pray



EMBRACE Prayer Group December 2014

'Last year I celebrated Christmas the Polish way' said a lady born in one of the towns in Northern Ireland. It is an amazing and confusing statement to hear. Is there anything special or different in the way Polish people celebrate Christmas? And why would someone like to do that? The answer to the last question is simple: close friendship with their Polish neighbours.

A Polish Christmas is rich in beautiful and meaningful customs. The celebration starts on Wigillia, Christmas Eve. Traditional foods are prepared and everyone anxiously awaits the moment when the first star appears in the sky – a signal to begin the feast to commemorate the birth of the Christ Child.

There is always a thin layer of hay under the white tablecloth in memory of the Godchild in the manger. Before sitting down at the table, many people break the traditional wafer and exchange good wishes for health, wealth and happiness in the New Year.

Poles are famous for their hospitality, especially during Christmas. In Poland, there is a vacant chair and a table setting is reserved for an unexpected guest, always provided for in hospitable Polish homes. It is kept for somebody unknown at the supper table. No one should be left alone at Christmas. This is to remind us that Mary and Joseph were also looking for shelter.

Christmas Day, called the first holiday, is spent with the family at home. No visiting, cleaning or cooking are done on that day, it is a day of enjoyment, to celebrate Jesus' birth. The second holiday, St. Stephen's Day is a day for visiting and exchanging Christmas greetings.

These are just a few from many Polish customs.

Each country has own richness and uniqueness and December might be a good time to engage in conversation with our new neighbours about Christmas traditions. How is Christmas celebrated in other places in the world? We can find out from people who are living and working among us.

This month we give thanks for:

- Hearts which are open for strangers this Christmas
- Friends who are like family and make life better

We pray for:

- People who are far from their families
- Families, whose loved ones won't celebrate Christmas with them.