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Trip to Moldova in January



Visiting Russian Churches around Chisinau, Moldova

(L-R) **(Host)** Kristina and (son) Timothy, **SOAR Team:** Jan Rich, Wendell Garrison and Heather Garrison; **Driver** Ruslan; **SOAR** Jan LeFevre, Noreen Sullivan, Becky Dwinnell; **Students** David and Diana Pogonets.

What do bumpy roads, smiley faces, gospel magic, Christmas stockings, and chocolate all have in common? A Stuff A Stocking distribution in the countries of Moldova and Ukraine! Our SOAR adventure this year took us through the cities, towns and villages of Chisinau, Comrat, Ocnita in Moldova, and Izmail and Sokyryany in Ukraine.

Our first distribution was in the small village of **Ocnita** close to the Ukrainian border. One of the first things we noticed were the already stuffed, brightly colored stockings



peeking through a window of the tiny church. Inside, the stockings were piled high on the floor and had spilled out onto the window sill. The church put on a vibrant and lively Christmas program followed by Wendell sharing the gospel through illusions. One hundred letters and stockings were handed out to very excited children.

A couple of hours later, we were greeted by a small Ukrainian church just across the border. In **Sokyryany**, again, stockings were spread across the front of the church to welcome the children inside. It was standing room only and about sixty stockings were shared with the children. They very excitedly read and responded to the letters written to them from America and Canada. A teen girl sitting in the front row was waiting for her father to come home the following week. He is serving in the Ukrainian military.

The next day in **Chisinau**, at the Voice of Truth church, there were two distributions: One in Romanian and one in Russian. During the gospel magic, Wendell chose volunteers to help with the tricks. One young girl chosen was a Ukrainian refugee, who along with her family, had spent one month staying safe in their basement while the fighting ensued around them. They are currently staying in Chisnau waiting for the war to end. Over two hundred stockings were distributed between the two programs at Voice of Truth church.



We then traveled several hours to **Izmail**, Ukraine. We were met at the border by an agent who apologized for asking us so many questions, checking our phones, and making sure we were going to keep his country safe. At one point he even had tears in his eyes. Kristina was able to share the gospel with him and show him pictures of children receiving the stockings.

Once in Ukraine we traveled to a **refugee camp**, close to the Romanian border. While walking to our rooms for the night, we noticed several pairs of shoes outside other rooms indicating a families were living there. A somber realization of what they must have given up to be safe in that room and at the camp.

We woke up early to help fill almost 200 stockings with Bibles, chocolates, toys, paper, pencils, hats and toothbrushes. That afternoon for the distribution, the church had standing room only, but only about 10 children there had ever been to Sunday School. God's word was shared and excited children were running onto the stage to help Wendell with the Gospel magic.





Our last distribution took us to **Comrat**, Moldova where we learned a large population of Turks had settled many years ago. Again, there was standing room only, and we were told that about 90% of the children and parents had never been in a church before. Over 150 stockings were handed out to the children after a Christmas program and Wendell's gospel magic.

Our last few days were spent with Oti Namesnic who is the director of **Bridge of Hope Ministry**. Oti shared his ministry of traveling into Ukraine delivering food baskets and other necessities to individuals, orphans, the elderly, and families still living in areas where the war has damaged their homes and communities. Oti also had us help shop for food and put together some food baskets which we then delivered to individuals and families living in very poor circumstances in a village outside of Chisinau.

Oti's team was unable to take us into Ukraine while we were with him, but he was still able to distribute 160 stockings to an orphanage in Ukraine after our team had gone.



So, **in summary**, here was Stuff A Stocking 2023 in Moldova:

We helped stuff and deliver 722 stockings filled with Bibles, toys, candy, and warm hats and socks that were delivered to boys and girls as they sang Christmas carols in five languages (Russian, Romanian, Ukranian, Turkish and English). Wendell presented gospel magic six times, translated by our fantastic partners Kristina and her son, Timothy.

We are delighted that we were able to give stockings to many unchurched children, where local pastors can continue providing a place where they can learn more about Jesus.

All these adventures have led to God's love and truth being shared with hundreds of children. Your part in **writing letters, sewing, giving financially, and praying for our team** has been a beautiful expression of God's hands extended. Thank you for helping to share the love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



**Thank you for all of your
encouragement, friendship,
prayers and support!**