



# ANABAPTIST INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES

Pointing people to Christ

Fall 2019 | Issue 76

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## **A POLISH CHRISTMAS**

*by Lolita Hershberger*

How would you like to sit down for a special Christmas Eve supper with your family and see a whole fish on a platter, lying in cold gelatin, in front of your plate? It doesn't sound quite as appetizing as ham and mashed potatoes, does it? But in almost every Polish home, the Christmas Eve meal would not be complete without a whole carp.

A few days before Christmas, at the local market, there are large tubs full of carp. People choose the fish they want and the proprietor grabs it, smacks it on the head, and it is ready to be prepared. Some people bring the fish home alive to swim in their bathtub until they are ready to kill and prepare it. Many cook the fish in broth, adding unflavored gelatin along with some vegetables and seasonings, and refrigerate it until the gelatin is set. It is then eaten cold. Others prefer to cut the fish into pieces.

The important thing, though, is that everyone has several different kinds of fish on their holiday table. Along with carp, there is pickled herring and fried fish. Poles are strongly traditional and even if they don't enjoy some of their own traditions, they are usually true to them. I have asked many of our friends if they enjoy the fish they eat on Christmas Eve, and most of them say they don't really like it, but it's an important tradition. Other typical dishes include red beet borscht with dumplings, noodles with poppy seeds, and meatless cabbage rolls.

"Poor Americans celebrate only one day of Christmas. We have THREE!" my friend said jubilantly. First is Christmas Eve on the 24th, an important meal that begins after sundown when the first star is seen in the sky. The table is set carefully with straw under the white tablecloth to commemorate Jesus' birth in a stable. There is also an empty place set at the table for any lonely wanderer who may be in search of food.

Another very important tradition is the breaking of the *oplatek*,

a thin wafer of flour and water. Each person present at the Christmas feast breaks a small piece of the wafer and gives it to everyone else. As people share the wafer with each other, they are supposed to forgive any hurts that have occurred over the past year and wish the other person happiness and blessings in the next year. This tradition brings the family closer together, and it is a tradition we enjoy as well. Poles also send *oplatek* to absent family members in place of Christmas cards.

After the main meal is over, Polish people sing Christmas carols and enjoy a variety of desserts. Gingerbread cookies, poppy seed roll, apple cake, nuts, chocolates, and fruit compote are some of the most popular desserts. A poppy seed roll looks similar to our familiar pumpkin rolls, but instead of a creamy filling, there is a thick layer of poppy seeds baked into the cake. Almost all Poles love this dessert, and our neighbors share one with us every Christmas.

At midnight, most Catholic families go to church for midnight mass, called the shepherd's mass because the shepherds were the first to greet the baby Jesus. Entire families, even the youngest children, fill the churches for this special service.

December 25, the First Day of Christmas, is spent with family at home and is a long day of feasting. A few years ago we were invited to spend this day with a Polish family and we sat at the table for seven hours, eating course after course of traditional food. To make up for the lack of meat on Christmas Eve, there was an astonishing amount of meat served at this

meal. Several kinds of *kielbasa*, meat loaf, hunter's stew (sauerkraut with sausage), ham, roast duck or goose, and meat spread for bread were a few of the dishes served. There were at least three different salads and four or more kinds of cake as well. We thoroughly enjoyed the experience of sharing such a special day with our friends. The entire family, from grandmother to young people, stayed at the table, having a good time all together. Most of the food was prepared by the 80-year-old grandmother over her wood-burning kitchen stove.

December 26, the Second Day of Christmas, is the day for visiting extended family and friends. It is also the day Polish Christmas caroling begins. Groups of four or five children dressed in costumes representing the three kings, Mary, King Herod, an angel, and a devil, wander from home to home singing carols. They expect to be paid with either money or sweets. We have started our own tradition of caroling American-style, and our friends and neighbors love it when we sing and give a little something to them instead of expecting something from them.

Christmas here is a good time, as it is anywhere, to lead people to look beyond their traditions and think about the gift of Jesus Christ and the meaning of his advent. We have tried to do that in various ways. For some years we have held an international carol singing evening for our English school students and other friends. It is great to have times like this to share the hope and light of Christ in a way that is open to us especially at Christmas.

**IN MEMORY OF  
JAN WIERSZŁOWSKI  
1917-2019**



*Jan & Ewa Wierszyłowski*

This past May, Jan Wierszyłowski died after gradually becoming weaker over a year or so. He was 92 years old.

He was raised in an evangelical Christian home and was active musically in various churches. He survived WW2, a German labor camp, and communism. As conductor in the Warsaw Philharmonic

he rubbed shoulders with many famous people, including Eleanor Roosevelt. However, as we knew him, he was a dignified gentleman with a heartfelt passion for the gospel, the church, and for God's kingdom to come on earth. No one, small or great, was safe from his warm twinkling eyes and a direct question, such as "Czy już masz bilet do niebie?" (Do you have your ticket to heaven?)

He deeply touched many lives. In spite of his single-mindedness which could sometimes come across harshly, there was no doubt where his heart was. He loved his Savior and wanted all to know Him.

He was significant in AIM's work in Poland. It was his suggestion to ask people at Faith Builders to get involved in ministry in Poland, in the late 1990s. He felt a deep personal responsibility to help AIM, and he often gave suggestions and introduced us to people he felt could be significant. He preached in our Sunday services and took every opportunity to inform people about Mennonites. He wasn't always understood or appreciated, but he didn't easily give up. His determination was an admirable trait.

We thank God for Jan's life. May Jan's desire for a thriving community of believers become a reality. - Lavern Hershberger

# THE MINISTRY OF MUSIC

by Hadassah Hershberger

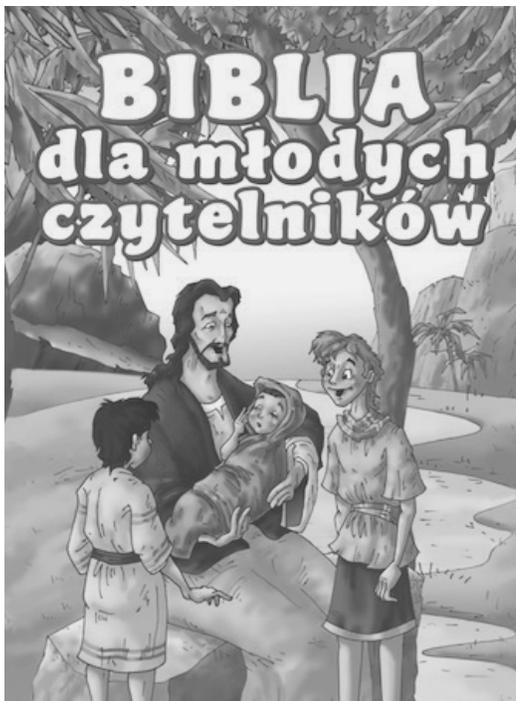
*Hadassah Hershberger, oldest child of Lavern and Lolita, has found various ways to cultivate and express her love of singing and music. In this article, she describes some of the ways that this interest has enabled her to share the love of Jesus with others in Poland.*

Hi! My name is Hadassah. I'm 20 years old and have been living in Poland for 18 of those years. I've loved music and making music for as long as I can remember. My parents instilled in us a love for singing and we still regularly sing together. At the age of 5 I begged my parents for piano lessons and soon picked up the techniques. Practicing was always the best part of the day. Music became vital to me, and throughout the following ten years, I took lessons at a public music school, learned to play more instruments, and sang in several choirs. Growing up, believers in my life often encouraged me to use my gifts for God's glory. During the years I was involved in music school, competitions, and performances, I was really struck with how self-glorifying and spiritually dangerous the secular music world can be. I knew I wanted my goal with music to be taking people's eyes away from me and pointing them to Christ. I began asking God for opportunities and for people who shared the same musical goals. Now as I look back at how He answered those prayers, His gifts truly feel like miracles. At a conference two years ago, I met a singer/songwriter who immediately wanted to start some ministry through music. Another girl joined us and this year we've sung in various cities around Poland. Our times together have been some of

*Hadassah singing and playing with friends Natalia and Sarah*



the most encouraging moments of my life. They allow us to do what we love all for the One who has made it possible. Other enjoyable moments this year include spending long evenings singing and playing instruments with friends and singing with my family at church events and around home. This summer, I helped lead music at several Christian conferences and camps. Music is such a huge gift we have, and when we can use it to encourage hearts and lift people's gaze to the Father, what an even bigger blessing it becomes! I know it will always be a part of my life in some form. Join me in praying for the continuation of this small, but beautiful ministry in Poland. I encourage you to use your gifts however possible, and to step out of your comfort zone and help expand His kingdom. Soli Deo gloria!



"Bible for young readers"

One of the books provided by EEM

## BIBLE AND LITERATURE DISTRIBUTION UPDATE

In the fall of 2018, AIM started partnering with an organization called Eastern European Mission (EEM) to distribute Bibles and Christian literature in Poland. After initially receiving a surge of orders through the Seed of Truth magazine, we have continued to receive a steady stream of requests for more literature. Many of these are from individuals, but some are from people involved in prison ministry and other evangelistic efforts. At the end of November 2019, EEM shipped us 2,000 copies each of children's Bibles, youth Bibles, child training books, and Bible study handbooks. Of the approximately 18,000 books and Bibles EEM has sent so far, we have distributed around 12,000. We are glad for this opportunity to help meet the need for quality Bibles and Christian books in Poland. EEM provides Bibles and books to AIM at no charge, but AIM pays distribution costs. If you would like to support the work of Eastern European Mission directly, you can visit their website at [www.eem.org](http://www.eem.org).

Anabaptist International Ministries  
P.O. Box 62  
Guys Mills, PA 16327  
*Address Service Requested*



## AIM Financial Report

July 1, 2019 – September 30, 2019

<b>Available balance July 1, 2019</b>	<b>\$11,870</b>
<b>Restricted funds July 1, 2019</b>	<b>\$121</b>

<b>Income</b>	
Unrestricted donations	\$29,501
Restricted donations	\$6,846
English lessons	\$3,164
<b>Total income</b>	<b>\$39,511</b>

<b>Expenses</b>	
Labor	\$30,326
Administrative	\$957
Facilities	\$1,869
Personnel	\$2,401
Public relations	\$1,180
Publications	\$1,306
Supplies	\$591
Travel & Events	\$121
Utilities	\$763
Other expenses	\$49
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$39,563</b>

<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$-52</b>
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<b>Assets released from restriction</b>	<b>\$6,772</b>
Restricted funds September 30, 2019	\$195
Available unrestricted funds	
<b>September 30, 2019</b>	<b>\$11,744</b>

## FINANCIAL NEEDS

From July 1 through November 30, we budgeted a need of \$67,292 for Seed of Truth publication, team member support, travel, and administration. We received \$49,096 in donations, \$18,196 less than our projected need. Fortunately, some expenses were less than projected. We have also postponed some expenses, such as the purchase of tickets for team member travel.

To address this gap between donations and actual monthly expenses, we ask you to consider making a commitment to regular giving to AIM. If half of the recipients of this newsletter gave \$20 per month, that would provide the support we need on a monthly basis. Will you consider making a regular gift to AIM?

In addition to gifts made by check, regular donations can be made online at [aimpoland.org/donate](http://aimpoland.org/donate). Donors may indicate preferences for where their gifts are used (such as staff support, GTE, or Seed of Truth) and AIM will honor preferences where possible. AIM reserves the right to assign all contributions where needed. If you would like additional information, please contact Matthew Mast at [homeoffice@aimpoland.org](mailto:homeoffice@aimpoland.org) or (814) 789-4394.