

SPAIN

Free hugs!

“We love because God first loved us.”

— 1 John 4:19

The street corners in Burgos, Spain, are filled with people. The youth at Brian and Noelia Fox’s church wanted to share God’s love with them! They wanted to do this by making friends with people, because they believe that God’s good news is best when shared with people they know.

Each Friday night, the youth group gathered together on the street. They offered free hugs to whoever wanted one. They also set up a table with a small box on it. On slips of paper, people could write things that they wanted prayer for and place it in the box. After spending a few hours giving free hugs, the youth would take their box of prayer requests to their Bible study and pray for each person who wanted prayer.

Many people who passed by asked the youth group why they were doing this. The youth group used these questions to share about their faith. God loved the people in the youth group so much that they couldn’t help but share that love with the people who passed by.

“We think that people need a lot of love and someone to listen to them,” said Vanesa Moreno, one of the young adults in the youth group. As the weeks went on, people began to remember the youth group, and asked for prayer when they passed by. Some of them began to come to church.

Questions for discussion

1. The youth group felt that it was important to not only talk about their faith, but to show their faith to others. Why do you think it was so important for them to show their faith? Why do you think it was important to tell about their faith, instead of only showing their faith?

2. Showing God’s love can be as simple as giving a hug or being a friend to someone who feels alone. Do you remember ways that you have shown God’s love to others? How can you show God’s love to others?
3. The youth group shared their faith with those who asked. How have you shared your faith with friends and family around you? How can you share your faith with others?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for all of the different ways that you show love to us. Give us the courage to speak and live in ways that share your love with others. Amen.

“FREE HUGS”

With your Sunday school teacher or parents, gather your Sunday school class together in the lobby of a school or church, or an entrance to a park. Post a sign saying “FREE HUGS.” When someone walks by, ask them if they would like a free hug. *It’s important to always ask before you hug someone.* If they say, “No, thank you,” just wave and say, “Have a nice day.” If anyone asks you why you are giving free hugs, tell them that you are sharing God’s love with them.

*(Teachers, if you feel comfortable, use this hug activity to talk about appropriate and inappropriate touch. To learn more about how to keep children safe in their churches and communities, visit <http://www.DovesNest.net> or read *Let the Children Come* by Jeanette Harder.)*



Photo by Jose Lozano

Free hugs—*Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas* church youth in Burgos, Spain, give out free hugs as a way to reach out to the community.

Our gifts can help support mission in Spain.

\$100 helps to provide discipleship materials for the youth and young adult groups.

\$75 helps to provide drums for worship nights.

\$50 helps to provide transportation for Brian and Noelia Fox to share God’s love with people around Spain.

\$25 helps one teenager to attend a youth retreat.

Gift designation. All gifts to support ministries in Spain should be sent to Mennonite Mission Network, PO Box 370, Elkhart, IN 46515-0370. Please indicate that the funds are for **“Mission Banks: Spain”** or **“Project #1436.”**

▶ For more activities and stories, visit www.MennoniteMission.net/SpainMissionBank.

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The generous shoemaker

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”
— Matthew 25:35

On a rainy December day many years ago, a student from Salamanca, Spain, entered a shoe shop. The rain had made his hair wet and his clothes muddy. The student didn’t have much money, but he said to the shoemaker, “Good morning, Sir! My younger brother only has one pair of shoes—and they are so worn! Can you make him another pair?” The shoemaker agreed, and told him to come back in four days.

The student returned to the shoe shop to pick up the shoes. “These shoes are perfect! My brother will love them. How much do I owe you?” the student asked.

The shoemaker shrugged. “Nothing. They are a gift for your little brother,” he said, and smiled.

“Thank you so much, Sir! You are always so kind to my family. I am poor now, but someday, when I am Archbishop of Toledo, I will be able to give you a generous gift,” exclaimed the student. (Toledo is a city in Spain.)

Do you want to practice giving?

- **Give your time.** Spend time with an elderly person in your church. You could read to them, or help them with chores around their house. Invite a classmate to your house, specifically one who doesn’t have many friends. Play a game with them or go to the park.
- **Give your energy.** Bake cookies for someone at your school or church that had a bad day. Make a card to thank people, like your mail carrier, or the person who cleans or cooks at school or church.
- **Give your things.** If you have clothes you no longer wear, give them to a thrift shop. You never know who is looking for summer shorts or a winter coat!

Years passed. The shoemaker was very old. His fingers were stiff and would not let him make shoes anymore. He had no way to make money to buy food.

One day, a priest came to ask the shoemaker to go with him to the palace of the Archbishop of Toledo. The shoemaker agreed to go.

At the palace, the Archbishop of Toledo remembered the shoemaker and that he was a very giving person. The archbishop kept his promise to repay the shoemaker. He gave the shoemaker 50 gold coins—enough money for the rest of his life. “A good deed never goes unnoticed,” said the Archbishop of Toledo.

—*Adapted from a traditional Spanish folktale,
The Student of Salamanca

Questions for discussion

Read Matthew 25:34-45. In this part of the Bible, Jesus talks about himself as the stranger who is helped. If we help strangers, how do you think we are also helping Jesus? Jesus no longer lives in human form, but lives in every person. Do you think that Jesus is living in each person that is helped? Are there times when you have helped someone in school or church? How does that change the way you feel about the person, when you remember that you are also helping Jesus?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for reminding us that you are in every person we meet. As we go about our day, help us to remember this and share what we have with others. Amen.



Photo from Wikimedia.org

Generosity comes in many forms: time, money, and energy are a few. What examples can you name from the story?

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Life's important links

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

—Philippians 1:3-6

In Burgos, Spain, Brian and Noelia Fox share Jesus' love with youth at their church. Sometimes, Brian and Noelia encourage youth to go to camp, where they can learn even more about God. In the reflection below, Judit Menéndez writes about her experience at camp, and the people who have shared Jesus' love with her. Judit graduated from Brian and Noelia's youth group and became the director of this Christian camp.

Can you imagine a place where nature, good friends, experiences with God, and fun are all together? When I imagine that, I think of a Christian summer camp! It is my favorite place in the world.

When I was 7 years old, I had my first experience in a camp, called *Siete Robles* (Seven Oaks). I had so much fun and, without knowing it at that moment, it changed my whole life! My counselors there taught me so many things, and made me feel accepted and loved. I met people who are now some of my best friends. I learned so much about my identity in Christ.

When I was 12 years old, in one of the teaching sessions at camp, I accepted Jesus as my Savior. Everything that I had learned from my Sunday school teachers started to be real for me. I began my own adventure with God. That is the reason why, years later, I decided to become a volunteer counselor at the camp and to dedicate my time and energy as others had done with me. It's like a chain, every link is joined, and every link is important. So if you don't know what to do with your free summer time, I encourage you to go to a summer camp, either as a counselor or as a camper. Who knows? Your life could change next summer!

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for our friends, camp counselors, Sunday school teachers, and youth pastors who have shared your love with us. We pray that you would encourage them and fill them with your love and wisdom. Amen.

Activity: A chain of importance

Judit said that her life is like a chain and every link is important. People are sometimes like links; each have shared an important part of their lives with us. As a way to show this, make a paper chain with several links. Write a name of someone that is important to you on every link. Use this paper chain as a reminder to pray for these people.



Photo by Linda Shelly

Caring links—Judit Menéndez (left) with her friend, Melisa Costas.

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