



Blythswood **NEWS**

SHOE BOX APPEAL 2026

REASONS TO SMILE

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shoeboxappeal.org



BECOME A REGULAR GIVER

We are very grateful for your support towards the Shoe Box Appeal. However, the need doesn't stop after Christmas. It's there every single week.

Become a regular giver and help change lives for good and forever across Europe, Asia and Africa.

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A PENCIL IN YOUNG HANDS BRINGS JOY

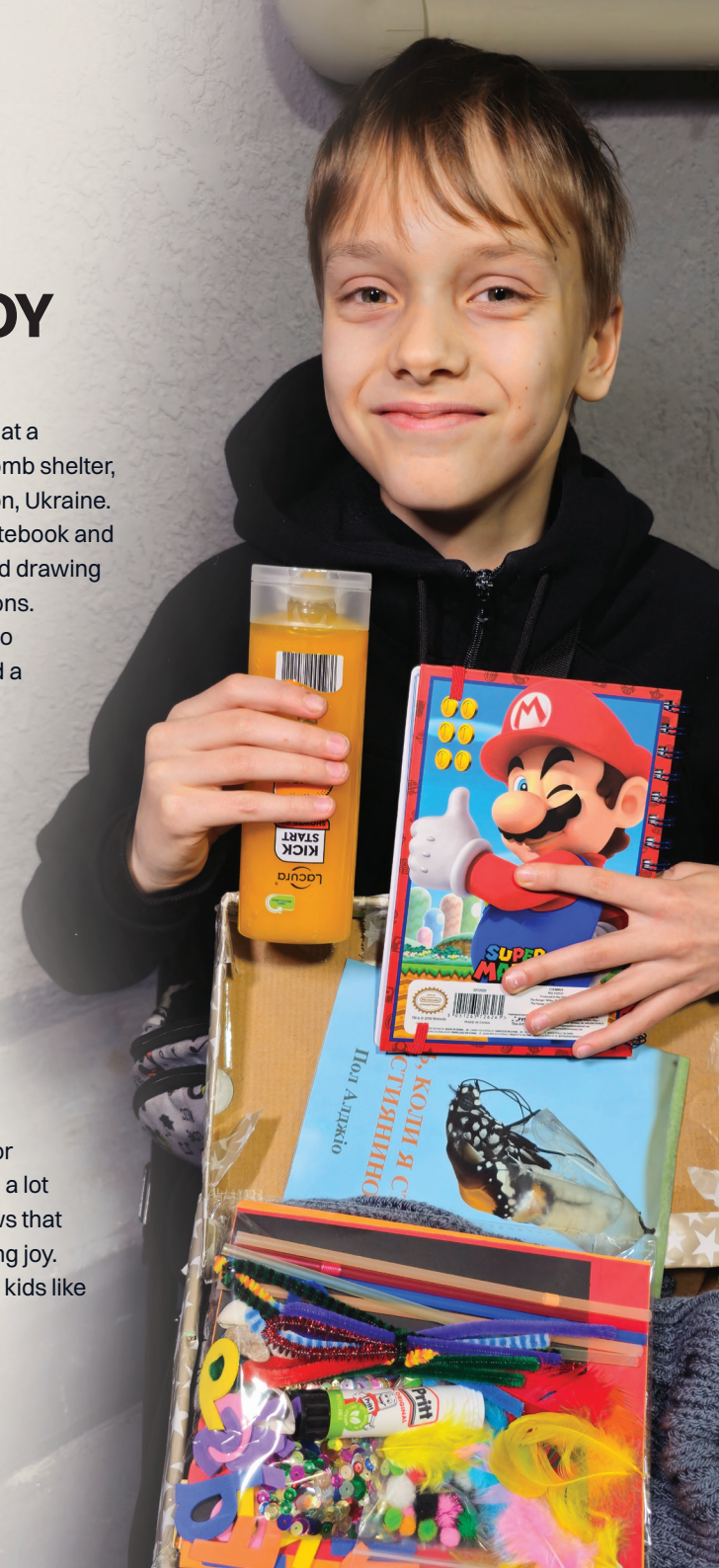
Yehor received his shoebox at a Christmas event held in a bomb shelter, in the frontline city of Kherson, Ukraine. And in his box he found a notebook and crayons. Playing football and drawing are Yehor's two great passions. Usually, his artwork relates to his sport but this time he had a different idea.

"The first thing he did was take out the coloured pencils and say that he wanted to draw an angel," says Tanya Tshpygunova who delivered your gifts.

"He wanted to give it to his neighbour, a soldier, as a Christmas gift.

"Even at his young age, Yehor understands that war brings a lot of sadness, but he also knows that a pencil in his hands can bring joy. Thank you for bringing joy to kids like Yehor – it means so much!"

Yehor with his notebook.





Their daily struggle for survival means that these children are not in school.

PRACTICAL AID FOR FAMILY WHO LIVE BY RECYCLING

Seven-year-old Ana is the youngest of four children in a village 20km from the city of Gjakova, Kosovo. In poor health and without employment, her parents, Gezim and Saranda, survive by scavenging through other people's rubbish for cans and scrap metal.

None of the children are in school, according to Faton Berisha, who delivered gift-filled boxes from Blythswood's 2025 Shoe Box Appeal. "They are extremely poor," he says, "and don't get any government support as a family".

Ana was excited to find sweets and colourful notebooks. Faton reports, "She still treasures them and looks after them with great care.

"Your shoeboxes were a great help, as the parents themselves said. In the packages they found important items for daily use, including hats, socks, scarves, gloves and hygiene items."

These items of clothing are valued in a region where average night-time lows can be below freezing for three months in the year.

GIFTS FOR KIDS ALLOWED HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Lajos got home for Christmas! After spending all year in a children's home, he and his brother and sister were allowed to return to the two-roomed village dwelling which is shared by their grandparents, father and step-mother in rural eastern Hungary.

Without a bathroom and with a smoky atmosphere from grandpa's cigarettes, the family's living conditions are judged to be unhealthy for the children.

Their father's minimal wage as a street sweeper holds no promise for a house of their own. But he obtained permission for the children to return in December. When all is said and done, there's no place like home.

And then there was that moment of excitement when the children received a box full of gifts from Blythswood's Shoe



Lajos was delighted with a new hat and gloves.

Box Appeal. The volunteer who delivered your presents observed Lajos' delight at all its contents, especially the cap and gloves. "He asked me to thank you so much for the lovely Christmas gift," she said.

"That moment of excitement when the children received a box full of gifts from Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal."

CHRISTMAS IN SLATINA



Pastor Roumen Ivanov tells how your gifts were distributed in one of the poorest communities in Bulgaria.

Almost everyone has gathered along the Roma ghetto's single street – about a hundred souls, children and adults spanning four generations, yet all inter-related. Their faces bear the marks of poverty and weariness, their Roma community seemingly condemned to live in unending deprivation. Golden rays linger on the muddy street, as if the sun itself, like us, wishes to offer its quiet, heavenly Christmas gift.

The ghetto lies in the hollow of a dry streambed: harmless and silent most of the year, but during heavy rains, a raging, merciless beast. The torrent devastates fragile shacks, sweeping away belongings and garbage alike, leaving only memories of loss and yet another reminder of life's fragility here. Thanks be

to God, it has taken no human lives so far.

We are visiting the children bringing them Christmas gifts: for most of them, the only presents they will receive this year.

Everyone has come outside. The children's cheeks are red from the cold, their clothes thin and worn, their eyes wide and shining, impatiently eyeing the van filled with boxes.

We have gifts for everyone – men and women, girls and boys, the elderly and infants alike. Hearing of our arrival, everyone has gathered outside the 'church' – the house we bought where a homeless family finds shelter, where soup is served on cold days, and where believers gather for prayer and worship.

In this ghetto, everyone believes. Not everyone lives as a believer should, but everyone knows one thing: if it were not for God's mercy, they would not survive the fate allotted to them. They are right: I, personally, would not last a single week in Dancho's damp, cramped, smoke-filled shack. Yet he has lived there his whole life.

Ask him, "How are you?" and he always replies: "I'm fine. Very fine." No irony in his words – only resignation and a strange, quiet hope.

Before we distribute the gifts, important things must be said. I share the message of Christmas, speaking of the One who left heavenly glory to be born into poverty

like theirs. Of the One who took the form of the poor and the rejected in order to lead people out of darkness, to restore the dignity, honour, and nobility they were created with as God's children.

Then I ask the men to bless their wives and children. The women – to bless their husbands. And the children – to bless their parents.

Never before had I seen these rough, hardened, sometimes wild men do such a thing. Hands accustomed to heavy labour now tremble slightly. Yet they embrace their wives – awkwardly, uncertainly – and whisper blessings. Some eyes grow moist. The air itself seems to change.



Yes, strange and unexpected things happen at Christmas.

Then we distribute the gifts. And for a brief moment – just a moment – in the muddy street in the Roma ghetto of the village of Slatina, poverty takes a step back, and hope dares to step forward.



Alketa: 'The people who prepared the gift did it for me with joy.'

GIFTS HELP TEENS LIVING IN POVERTY

Alketa, aged 16, lost her father in an accident some time ago. Her mother is fully occupied with the care of one of Alketa's sisters who lives with disabilities and has many health problems.

Living in a low-income community in Bathore, Albania, the family is financially dependent on their grandmother who still works and tries to help them survive.

"I really liked the shoebox because of the fantastic gifts," Alketa says. "Books, combs, socks and many necessary and fun things. I liked that the people who prepared the gift, did it with joy for me.

Many thanks to each person! My mother liked everything, too, because she does not have the opportunity to buy things for us."

WHEN LOVE NEEDS NO TRANSLATION

Paul Algeo has served as Blythswood's church engagement officer for south and central Scotland since 2024. In December, he helped to distribute shoeboxes in the Cahul district of southern Moldova.

"I couldn't understand one word this lady was saying but her gratitude was obvious," he remembers. "She was so frail and wanted to take my hand and squeezed it tight.

"There is real poverty in these rural villages. As we entered one, we saw a man using a traditional well sweep – a long pole balanced on a crossbeam, with a rope and bucket attached to one end. Once the bucket reached the surface,

"It was encouraging to see how our partners care for people who were clearly struggling to meet even their most basic needs."



he secured the pole before collecting the water. It's too easy to assume that everyone living in Europe has access to the basic amenities that we take for granted.

"It was encouraging to see how our partners care for people who were clearly struggling to meet even their most basic needs. Your shoebox gifts were so much appreciated. I only speak English, but acts of love, kindness and compassion are understood by everyone. Love doesn't need translation."

Paul has now taken on the task of managing Blythswood's 2026 Shoe Box Appeal. "I've seen for myself the emotional impact made by these presents," he says. "Fill a box for Blythswood in 2026 and you can really touch the heart of a stranger in need."



Rashid: 'The gifts are things I could never afford.'

'SOMEONE CARES ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE ME'

Rashid may have missed out on school, but at the age of 15 he has wisdom beyond his years. Growing up at the brick kiln where his parents work, in Punjab province, Pakistan, he says: "I must work to help my family survive."

Every rupee counts in situations where the combined earning of a family equates to as little as £3 per day. So, you can only imagine how much it meant to Rashid to be presented with a Box of Blessings, sponsored by Blythswood's 2025 Shoe Box Appeal. "The gifts are things I could never afford," he says. "We struggle to meet even our basic needs like toothpaste, a toothbrush and warm winter essentials."

Rashid explains that the gift means more than the things inside. "It reminds me

that someone cares about young people like me," he continues. "We gathered to pray and to listen to a message about God's love and care for his people. As I listened, I felt encouraged. The first time in a long time, I felt that maybe God could change my life, too."

Last winter, Blythswood's partners in Pakistan made up 2,000 boxes and distributed them to families such as that of Rashid, living in extreme poverty. "Our partners told me that the volunteers who filled the boxes with essential everyday items were moved to tears by the experience," says Blythswood's chief executive Jeremy Ross. "Their involvement brings more ownership. Like our shoebox volunteers here in the UK they discovered that it's more blessed to give than to receive."



SHOEBOX SMILES AT SUNSHINE SCHOOL

Rafael is one of the students at Raza de Soare, a school for children with special needs in Arad, Romania. Abandoned by his mother and diagnosed with autism, he was left in the care of his father who did not know how to help him.

Rafael was 11 when he started school. Now he is a calmer person and can make decisions for himself.

Raza de Soare means sunshine, and Principal Corina Lobont says that your

gifts brightened Christmas for Rafael and for the other children in her care.

"Your kindness and thoughtfulness brought genuine joy, excitement and smiles to our students," she writes. "For many of them, these gifts meant much more than material presents – they represented care, inclusion, and the reassurance that they are valued and remembered by the community. "Thank you for making the Christmas season brighter for our children."

HAPPY TO HELP, CLAUDIU SPREADS THE LOVE

At seven years of age, Claudiu has to be one of Blythswood's youngest shoebox distributors. Of course, there was one for him, too, after he had helped to hand them out in the compound where he lives with his family, in small-town western Romania.

"Claudiu is a very loving little boy, happy all the time and full of life," says Adrian Popa who oversaw the shoebox distribution, and who also leads the work of Talita Kum (TK), Blythswood's after-school programme in Jimbolia.

"He thoroughly enjoys the food at TK, brushes his teeth and takes showers." For children from such poor homes, nutrition is of first importance. And finding a toothbrush and toothpaste in their shoebox helps to reinforce the idea that oral hygiene is something for home as well as for the after-school club.

Adrian says: "Claudiu has not had a very good start in life. But a Christmas present like this tells him that someone cares, that he is worth the trouble of sending a shoebox from a far-away country."

Happy and full of life, Claudiu helped deliver your gifts.





Svitlana was visibly touched by your kindness.

SVITLANA SHARES HER SHOEBOX

Svitlana has had to adjust to many difficult changes in her life. When the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, she and her brother were taken abroad to Poland.

“It made her so happy to have the opportunity to share part of the gift with someone she loved.”

Eventually she was placed with a foster family as her mother was unable to care for her, and was taken back to her homeland.

Now living in a small town in western Ukraine, not far from Ternopil, the 11-year-old was able to attend a Christmas event for children where she was presented with a Blythswood shoebox.

“Your gifts brought her sincere joy and surprise,” reports Yulia who delivered the box. “She carefully looked through everything inside and was visibly touched by your kindness.

“She showed particular interest in the book and calendar, which she planned to give to her grandmother. This made Svitalana especially happy because she knew that her grandmother follows dates closely and would love it. It made her so happy to have the opportunity to share part of the gift with someone she loved.”



Working a ten-hour day outside in winter conditions, Arkan values the gift of a warm scarf and hat.

SHOEBOX GIFTS EASE LIFE ON THE ECONOMIC MARGIN

At 50, Arkan is a father of five, and proud grandfather to five more. With three generations living under one roof, the household budget is always tight. Arkan works, as he has since he was a child, as a windscreen washer at busy traffic junctions in Kragujevac, the fourth largest city in Serbia.

It's a precarious and legally questionable way to earn a living but it's the only way that Arkan knows to pay the rent and put food on the table. Spending up to 10 hours a day outside, often in the cold, he really appreciated the gift of a hat and scarf which he found in his shoebox.

“They help him stay warm throughout the working day,” says David Armus who

presented him with your gifts. “The family used to live in a shack but now they rent a house. Their life is not easy as three of his children have undergone surgery. Arkan draws strength and hope from his faith and was particularly touched by the Christian testimony booklet which he found in his shoebox.

“Thanks to Blythswood, he feels that his daily struggles are not forgotten and that someone, even from far away, cares about him and his family.”

In each shoebox, Blythswood supplies a Bible story book for children, a testimony booklet for teens and young adults, or a Words of Life pictorial calendar with a Bible verse for each month.



Your gift made
Nadia feel valued.

ENOUGH TO MAKE THE WORLD A LITTLE BIT BETTER

In the Slavic countries, the girl's name Nadia means Hope. But for this Nadia, who attends a school in Odesa region for children with special educational needs, it has to be said her expectations are not high. "She lives in a world where there is not always acceptance," says Alyona Puzanova, who gave Nadia a Blythwood shoebox.

"It's a world where you can be teased for your peculiarities, where you are often reminded that you are not like everyone else.

"And then, suddenly – a box. It is all for Nadia. Stationery, toys, sweets that do not need to be divided. At that moment, the child understands: 'I am important. I was seen. I was thought of.'

"This gift didn't just bring joy. It gave Nadia a sense of value and warmth. And sometimes that's enough to make the world a little bit better."

**"And then,
suddenly – a box"**



**'I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT
SPENDING MONEY ON SUCH
THINGS FOR MYSELF'**

Nasreen: 'I never thought about spending money on such things for myself.'

Pakistan's Christian minority constitutes less than two percent of the population. Typically, they are much poorer than their Muslim neighbours. Life can be very difficult for families like that of Nasreen, whose husband is a day labourer. "Some days he finds work, and other days he does not," she says. "To support our family, I work as a maid in people's homes. It's still difficult to meet the basic needs of our family."

Nasreen, 38, was invited to a gathering with other low-income villagers at which Blythwood's partners gave them each a Box of Blessings, filled with gifts purchased in Pakistan and sponsored by the 2025 Shoe Box Appeal.

She says: "We prayed, sang and listened as the pastor shared about Jesus, the Son of God, who is the greatest gift God has given to the world. In the midst of our day-to-day struggles, that gathering felt like a small ray of hope."

Nasreen describes receiving the Box of Blessings as a very emotional experience. "When I opened it, I saw many things – the winter essentials, the snacks and especially the items for personal hygiene. These hygiene items were things I had never used before in my life, because we couldn't afford them. I never thought about spending money on such things for myself."

YOUR GIFTS ARE A BLESSING

Thank you for filling shoeboxes last year. I see them come into our warehouse and sorting stations, where Christian literature is added, then packed in larger cartons to protect them as they travel.

The next time I see them, they will have arrived in Europe, where I'm with a local partner distributing shoeboxes to the poorest people in the community. Sometimes I get to hand them over. When we can, we stay around for a little while to see people open their boxes.

It's lovely when there's an instant reaction to a toy or a pencil, when a child starts playing. Older people tend to inspect their boxes, replace the lid and take them away. But they especially appreciate the gifts. It's humbling to think that a 38-year-old woman who couldn't afford personal hygiene products received her first one in a shoebox.

Please do fill a shoebox, or as many as you can, this year. Our partners bring these practical gifts and the gospel message to the poorest in their communities, to people who are unlikely to receive anything else at Christmas.



If, for any reason, you're not able to find a shoebox and gather the gifts to put into it, then there's another way you can help. For £28 – the approximate value of goods in a shoebox filled in the UK – our partners in Pakistan are able to buy essential items, pack them in a Box of Blessing and deliver them to people in great need. The difference in costs between there and here means that two boxes can be filled for the cost of one in the UK, so two people benefit from each £28 received in our online Shoe Box Appeal.

Your time and effort in putting shoeboxes together and your donations to send them on their way are a great blessing. Thank you for supporting Blythswood's 2026 Shoe Box Appeal.

Jeremy Ross
Chief Executive



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