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Thanksgiving in Poland: Missionaries Cal and Erin Hiebsch Fed 70 Guests When They Expected 30

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Thanksgiving is probably one of our bigger entrées into American culture,"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Cal and Erin Hiebsch expected 20 or 30 people at their Thanksgiving table in Poland. Nearly 70 showed up instead. The house filled to standing room only, the food somehow stretched to feed every last guest, and every person in the room heard the Gospel before the night was over.

The International Mission Board shared their story on November 19, featuring the couple in the 2026 Week of Prayer for International Missions.

For the Hiebsches, Thanksgiving is more than a cherished American holiday. Living and serving in Poland as International Mission Board missionaries, it has become one of their most effective opportunities to build relationships, share their culture and ultimately point people to Christ.

It works because Thanksgiving is uniquely American. While Poland celebrates Christmas and Easter on a grand scale, most Poles have never sat down to a Thanksgiving meal. Many are familiar with the holiday and curious about its traditions, and over the years the Hiebsch family has learned to use that curiosity as a bridge for ministry.

Each year, they invite friends, neighbours and participants from their English conversation clubs to experience a traditional Thanksgiving meal. For many guests, it is their first encounter with foods such as stuffing, green bean casserole, sweet potato casserole and roasted turkey. Even finding a whole turkey in Poland can be a challenge, since stores more commonly sell turkey breasts and other cuts rather than the whole bird.

"Thanksgiving is probably one of our bigger entrées into American culture," Cal explained.

One Thanksgiving in particular is especially memorable for the family. It happened in 2018, and the Hiebsches still talk about it today, because it remains difficult to explain outside of God's provision. They prepared for one number of guests and served more than twice as many.

With the help of volunteers, Erin and the culinary crew carefully planned a special celebration. "We had people in four or five different kitchens across the city cooking," she said. A generous spread of traditional American dishes filled the tables, and invitations had been extended throughout their community.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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