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Holiday Overseas Looks a Lot Like Christmas in United States

By Leila Heinonen & Emelie Lundgren
Decree Staff Writers

NC Wesleyan is hosting plenty of different nationalities, both in students and faculty/staff. Students and faculty/staff from Africa, South- and Central America, Asia as well as Europe share the tradition of Christmas but celebrate the holiday in their own different way. But some common aspects include having a Christmas tree, going to church and spending time with the immediate family. And they all emphasize... enormous amounts of food.

Africa

Wesleyan's African students and faculty include John Mendy, a student from Gambia, Fred Lemongo (Cameroon), Clayton Sonn (South Africa) as well as math professor Dr. Mulugeta Markos (Ethiopia).

They are all Christians, although Mendy and Dr. Markos are Catholics, which affects their Christmas celebrations making them different from Sonn's and Lemongo's.

All of the represented countries celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December, and all go to church on the morning of Christmas Day. Feasts are a big part of the day, at least for the families able to afford it.

According to Lemongo, people of Cameroon cook an enormous amount of food because, during the holiday, people walk from house to house visiting each other. "I remember how my mom cooked food for 10 people for 3 days because she expected so many guests," Lemongo said. There are no special dishes for the Christmas feast, said Lemongo, although a lot of families cook pancakes for the celebrations.

Lemongo said that even Muslims celebrate a form of Christmas in Cameroon, since the people are close and Muslims like to visit their neighbors and friends on the day of the holiday.

Lemongo added that it's only the children under the age of 10 who get really excited about Christmas. They are the only ones receiving gifts and since the older kids have figured out

that Santa Claus doesn't exist, they mainly spend the day with their friends. They might receive money from their parents to get a gift for themselves, according to Lemongo. Many of the teenagers hang out at the Christmas festival which occurs from the 19th to 24th of December when there are plenty of activities, everything from music to fireworks. "It's a great place to hang out, especially if you have a girlfriend," Lemongo said.

Dr. Markos also emphasized the importance of food and feasting together during the Christmas celebrations. Before Christmas day, there is a fast for 44 days in the country, and on Christmas day everyone ends the fast. People share food with each other, for example wealthier families with the needy, according to Dr. Markos.

Since Dr. Markos is Catholic and believes the wise men brought gifts to Jesus, his family does not exchange gifts with each other. "I can see how some Ethiopians living in the U.S. have started to exchange presents with each other; that's not the traditions we have at all," he said.

Mendy, who is part of the 10% Christians in the Islamic country of Gambia, said that families exchange food with each other just like material presents. And since most families are poor, the smallest children walk around from house to house in a "trick or treat" kind of way, asking for food or a smaller amount of money rather than candy.

According to Mendy, the majority of Christian families raise pigs and for Christmas day they slaughter the biggest one, which they cook together with rice and vegetables. "It's kind of a combination of fried rice and pork chops," Mendy said. "It's called bena chin ni mbam."

Sonn, representing the country of South Africa, also attends church on Christmas morning, and spends the entire day with the family. They do have a Christmas tree, and usually exchange presents after church in the early morning, and then again just before lunch. The food consists mainly of meat and chicken.

Lemongo, Sonn and Mendy agree that there is plenty of advertising hype about Christmas in their respective country. They said that commercials and TV-promotions have most definitely started in their country by now, but considering the high number of poor people in their countries, only the food and clothing industry will benefit from the holiday.

Dr. Markos feels differently. "It was 11 years ago I left Ethiopia, but as far as I can remember it (Christmas) is not a big marketing matter in the country," he said.

South and Central America

Latin America is represented by Edgar Zalvidar (El Salvador), Gene Kemble and Jaine Lindo (both from St Maarten), Victor Wong (Guatemala), and Marcelo Prata (Brazil). They are all Christians, except for Lindo who doesn't claim a particular religion. "I would just say a believer of God," Lindo said. Wong, Zalvidar and Prata are Catholics, while Kemble was raised as a Jehovah Witness and therefore doesn't celebrate Christmas at all, but he knows other families in St Maarten that do.

Kemble said that there definitely are some activities happening on the island when Christmas comes around. The marketing hype isn't as big and doesn't start as early as in the U.S., he said, but there is a parade and a contest for the best decorated house during the holiday. And most of the houses do have Christmas lights and other decorations, according to Kemble.

Lindo echoed Kemble on the typical Christmas Day celebration; some families go to church and most have a Christmas tree and exchange gifts, mainly within the family, though some schools even hand out gifts for their students. The food consists of turkey, ham "...and other things you'd see on a Thanksgiving table," said Kemble. On the other hand, Lindo said his family mainly eats typical St Maarten food, like Ockra soup (a soup made out of vegetable usually served with rice), commmeal, fish and rice, as well as chicken and Johnny-cakes (or combread).

The celebrations for Zalvidar and Wong are similar. They both celebrate Christmas with their entire family, "...uncles, grandparents, cousins etc.," said Wong, and families usually go to church in the morning. They both have a Christmas tree and exchange presents within the family. Foods are typically turkey and ham.

As far as the marketing of the holiday, the two agree it's a big deal in their countries. Sometimes it starts as early as the end of October to early November, according to Zalvidar, and Wong said that a big Christmas tree always is set up on a famous plaza of Guatemala.

Prata, as well as Zalvidar and Wong, celebrates Christmas on the 24th to honor the birth of Jesus Christ, which they believe happened at that date. Prata also emphasized family and food for the celebrations; turkey, fish, duck and chicken are included in the ordinary Christmas meal.

Many families have chickens in their backyard and, according to Prata, the family all goes out in the backyard to catch a chicken for the meal. The first one to be caught is the one they will boil and later eat.

As for presents, Prata said that families exchange inexpensive presents with each other and no one gives to any one in particular. "We put all the gifts together in a pile, and then someone takes a present out of the pile when it's their turn," Prata said. "It's like a game."

Europe

Among Wesleyan's European students are Markus Ribbenstedt (Sweden), Alexander Bemtsen (Norway), Janne Tusa (Finland), Javier Castrillo (Spain), Hlynur Hauksson (Iceland), Marine Meyet (France), Thomas Sharp (England), and Benedikt Eger (Germany).

Except for Sharp, all the students said their countries celebrate Christmas on 24th of December. And all generally celebrate Christmas in the same way by going to church, eating with the immediate family and exchanging gifts. But there are some differences, especially with the food traditions. All students emphasized that Christmas celebrations depend on the wealth of the family.

Scandinavian countries share many of the Christmas traditions but there are

some exceptions. All of the Scandinavians celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve, 24th of December, by eating a Christmas dinner with immediate family and exchanging gifts.

"We go to the church, eat with the family, play games and of course exchange presents," said Ribbenstedt. "What I mean by games is that we enjoy dancing and singing around the Christmas tree."

Finland and Sweden have many similar food traditions. Ribbenstedt said that the Swedish meals include: Christmas ham, meatballs, potatoes, jansson's temptation (a casserole with a sprats—a small fish—potatoes and onions), sausage, raw cold sliced salmon with dill, salad. "And of course chocolate," added Ribbenstedt.

Tusa added that the Finnish dinner also includes sweetened potato soufflé, rutabaga-and-carrot casserole, and sweetened loaf, which is a traditional bread eaten during Christmas.

Bemtsen said that they have a different kind of food traditions from the rest of the Scandinavians. Norwegians eat ribs, reindeer meat, sausages, potatoes, and stewed or oven-baked casserole of layered boneless lamb and vegetables, he said.

As in the United States, the marketing of Christmas starts early in many European countries. "Usually the marketing starts in the late November," said Ribbenstedt. "You can see commercials on TV with different companies advertising their special Christmas offers. Christmas is probably the biggest day of celebration in Sweden."

Bemtsen agrees with Ribbenstedt: "They market Christmas very early!" he said. "Streets are covered with Christmas accessories such as trees, lights, and snow."

The Scandinavians' neighbors, the Germans, observe Christmas by going to church and spending time with the family. "We eat together with the family and exchange presents later that night in front of a Christmas tree and just enjoy the evening together," says Eger.

Traditional German Christmas foods are: roast goose, fish, duck, potatoes, gravy, beans, German potato salad, and red cabbage. And for desert Germans enjoy cake or red berry compote with vanilla sauce. "Food is an important element of Christmas and we spend a lot of time preparing and eating it," Eger said.

In England, Sharp said, he celebrates Christmas mainly with family. "We have a Christmas tree and we exchange presents on 25th of December just like Americans," said Sharp. Typical English Christmas dinner features turkey, beef, lamb along with lots of different vegetables, and sweet mince pies.

As with other European countries, Sharp said that a big marketing push occurs in his country in advance of the holiday. "There is a lot of early hype; it starts in November with commercials and shops advertising products," said Sharp.

According to Castrillo, Christmas and New Year's Eve are very big celebrations in Spain. "We have a big dinner among the family on 24th, and after that we go to the church to celebrate the 'cock mass,' where people sing," said Castrillo. Traditional Spanish food consists of different kinds of appetizers, like shrimp, Spanish ham, and cheese; for the main meal they usually eat fish or meat.

Spanish people usually have a Christmas tree, and it is set around the 15th of December but they exchange gifts days before the Christmas Eve—on the 5th of December. "It's called the Magic King Night, where Melchor, Gaspar, and Batastar are traveling around Spain to give the presents that children have requested in their letters some days ago. The Three Magic Kings are more popular and more celebrated than Santa Claus in Spain."

Castrillo said that, since 1895, the most famous Spanish tradition is the New Year's celebration. "We eat 12 grapes to celebrate the New Year. There is a big clock in the main square of Madrid. All the Spanish TV channels are broadcasting live from this place, so our tradition is to eat one grape with each of the first twelve ring bells of the New Year."

See HOLIDAY pg 2



Jamal Smith (21) and the Bishops defeated Averett, 28-13, for a share of the conference lead, but CNU won the tie-breaker and advanced to the NCAAs. See football wrap-up on page 3. Decree Photo by Brittany Nichols

Administration Breaks Down Operating Budget

By Emelie Lundgren
Decree Staff Writer

The college's annual budget has been late because of an unexpected decrease in enrollment of new students for the academic year as well as pending decisions from faculty/staff about early retirement. According to President James Gray, the budget is now balanced, meaning that revenues and expenses will be equal. Gray and Vice President of Finance Loren Loomis Hubbell explained the budget as follows:

The total amount of the budget is about \$20 million and the operating expenses are divided into the following categories:

- Institutional Support, 29%: Includes running of institution; campus insurance, pay and benefits for the president and vice presidents, employee benefits, IT and telephones; security; and advancement (formerly development department, it handles functions of fund-raising department and preparations of articles for alumni journal).

- Instruction, 24%: Includes any direct expenses that involve the relationship between faculty/staff and student, for example faculty salaries and science labs. According to Loomis Hubbell, 73.1% of the amount goes to faculty salaries and 9.8% to staff.

- Student Services, 14%: Includes student success center, financial aid office, student activities and athletics. Loomis Hubbell said 51% of the total amount for student services goes to athletics.

- Auxiliary services, 11%: Includes dining services, the bookstore and costs associated with resident directors and resident assistants in the dorms.

- Facilities, 10%: Includes payment/costs of the buildings, maintenance and landscaping. Loomis Hubbell said the breakdown of numbers and percent is hard to estimate for specific areas within the category. But she estimates landscaping at 5.7% of the total amount ticketed for facilities. "This is based upon prior experience, but I am only estimating the numbers," Loomis Hubbell said.

- Depreciation, 5%: It's typical for an institution to estimate the lifespan of an inventory and divide the total cost with the number of years estimated, to pay off

a certain amount each year. Depreciation could be described as an annual "use charge" of, for example, furniture.

- Academic support, 4%: Includes the library and the school paper, The Decree, as well as the honors program, writing lab and academic affairs.

- Public services, 2%: Includes the Dunn Center and other services Wesleyan offers to the public.

- Interest on debt, 1%: Debt payment per year is about \$200,000 of a total debt of approximately \$4 million, "a conservative amount," said Gray, who added that part of the remaining debt is left over from construction of the Dunn Center.

By comparison with similar colleges the debt is small and totally manageable, according to Gray. There is, for example, no debt on the library, which was expanded recently. Wesleyan is a tuition-driven institution, which means that most of the revenue comes from students enrolling at the school. According to Loomis Hubbell, this has both a positive and a negative effect. "It means that we are directly affected by the enrollment and that the budget can go up and down quickly," she explained, "but it also means that we can't be careless of our students; we have to be in tune with their wishes and concerns in order for them to continue their education at the school."

In addition to the tuition the institution runs on operating funds and donor gifts, from, for example, trustees, local companies and alumni.

The operating revenues are divided into the following categories:

- Net tuition revenue, 63%.
- Auxiliary services, 22%: Includes the bookstore, dining and housing.

- Restricted revenues, 8%: Including, for example, endowment scholarships and money from the North Carolina State Government, to give grants to North Carolinian students.

- Other revenue, 5%: Money from certain operations on campus such as vending machines, transcripts fees and ticket sales from the Dunn Center.

see BUDGET pg 4

Hunger Banquet Speaker: 'We Need to Do More'

By Melanie Rhodes
Decree Staff Writer

Imagine that you are hungry and don't know where your next meal is coming from. You're wondering how you're going to survive.

Participants recently had the opportunity to experience what it's like to be separated into upper class, middle class and lower class at the 2010 World Hunger Banquet held November 17 at the Dunn Center on the North Carolina Wesleyan campus.

The World Hunger Banquet was hosted by David Joyner, a Rocky Mount native who serves on the boards of local non-profit organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and My Sister's House.

"I am here tonight because I was raised to believe it is my responsibility and not just a choice," he told the audience.

Joyner said that world hunger affects virtually every family in the U.S. and around the world, whether it's experienced first-hand by you or someone you know, or someone in your community.

"It's estimated that 15 children die every minute and 22,000 children die per day," Joyner said. "That is greater than the number of children in the Nash-Rocky Mount School System."

According to StopTheHunger.com, worldwide more than nine million people have died so far this year from hunger and the rate continues to increase by the minute. In addition, it is estimated that over one billion are undernourished and do not have easy access to food.

Upon entering the banquet, participants drew numbers to see what class they would be sitting in. Wesleyan's coordinator for this event was Ben Robinson, AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer on campus. "This was an experiment we wanted the participants to experience first-hand."

Each participant was served food according to the class assigned. The upper class meal consisted of chicken, rice, beans, rolls and sweet tea. The middle class meal consisted on rice, beans and sweet tea. The lower class meal consisted of rice in a napkin and water.

Banquet participants were able to experience a different view on what hunger was all about.

See BANQUET pg 2