

If you're after a project you can physically touch and see, here are a few ideas:

Toiletry kits

Most local relief agencies and homeless shelters go through thousands of small toiletry kits every year. Small bags with sample sizes of toothpaste, deodorant, soap and feminine hygiene products make basic hygiene easier for people without permanent housing—and they have a long shelf life. Think also about children in shelters and the kinds of things—stickers, crayons, activity pages—they might love to receive.

Angel trees

Set up an “angel tree” in your church. Connect with a local refugee ministry who can provide you with a list of much-needed items for newcomers to our country. Place paper ornaments listing these needs on a Christmas tree, have people pick an ornament and return the purchase item. That way you can physically shop for someone while knowing that your purchase is specifically needed.

Physical visits to those who are housebound or hospitalized

Perhaps the best way to teach children about generosity is to model for them the giving of our time. Ask a minister in your church to connect you with homebound members who cannot attend the children’s Christmas pageant or church fellowship. Call a local senior centre and ask them to identify residents who never have visitors. Talk to the chaplain at your local hospital to find out who are the patients in long-term care who seldom have visitors. And then take yourself and your family to visit some of these people.

Christmas trees and decorations

Not all families can afford a Christmas tree and decorations. Your neighbourhood school might know of someone who would enjoy the gift of a Christmas tree and decorations.

Invite someone to Christmas dinner

More and more people in our society live alone. One of the most personal things you could do is invite someone to share Christmas dinner with your friends and family. And maybe even consider putting a small gift under the Christmas tree for them!

Adapted from an article at Baptist News Global.



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Christmas Gift Boxes

A good choice for children around the world?



Across Canada, many Presbyterian congregations will participate in a gift box project at Christmastime.

Several organizations ask people, children in particular, to fill boxes with gifts for children living in vulnerable communities in countries across the globe. Such projects have great appeal for Canadians who are concerned about helping those in need, especially children who are at risk due to poverty, hunger or emergency situations—they want to brighten the lives of these girls and boys and let them know someone cares. Because the project is hands-on, easy and fun for children it is even more attractive as a tangible way to make a difference while teaching children about generosity during the season of giving.

However, some things should be considered...



Some things to consider:

- Are the children more than receivers?
Are they asked what they need in order to make a difference in their lives? Is there respect for the ingenuity and power of children to make a difference in their own lives?
- Who decides which children get a box and which don't?
What criteria are used? Is it acceptable that some children are left out?
- Do the gifts contribute to the health of the child?
- Are the gifts culturally appropriate? Do they export a western emphasis on consumerism?
- If gifts are given, could and should gifts be purchased in that country to support its economic growth rather than be shipped from Canada?
- What is the purpose of the project? Does it invite study to understand the global context in which the children live?
- Does the project address the root causes of poverty and need?
If it doesn't, then—while it may bring momentary delight to a child—it won't make a long-lasting difference or change the situation that prolongs the cycle of poverty.
- Are the contents appropriate to The Presbyterian Church in Canada's respect for people of other faiths? (See *Living Faith, Our Mission and Other Faiths*, 9.2.1)
- Does the distribution of gifts contribute to the PCC's strongly held value of partnership? Has the partner requested or approved the gift? Did we seek guidance from the church's international staff and partners as to what is needed?



Another View on Shoebox Projects

It is a kind gesture to assemble and send gifts in an effort to bring joy to children in vulnerable communities in our global village, but when you consider the broader, sometimes detrimental impacts of such an initiative, it may be worth considering other options.

- Many cultures do not emphasize the giving of gifts as a way of celebrating Christmas, as we do. When we send items that are popular here in Canada, we are imposing values of materialism on others who do not have the means to support an ongoing tradition of giving gifts.
- Many of the recipients belong to other faith traditions and may not celebrate Christmas. In some shoebox projects, Christian evangelistic materials are given out along with the boxes as a way of proselytizing.
- Some of the things we send are culturally inappropriate. For example, many gift boxes send products that children don't use, toys that kids have never heard of them, or battery-operated toys to places where batteries are either unavailable or unaffordable.
- Gifts cannot be distributed to all children fairly. The result is that some children receive gifts while others do not and sometimes fights occur between communities because there aren't enough gifts for everyone.
- The cost of publicity, filling, sending and distributing boxes is significant. Such a large amount of money could be better spent meeting a family's basic needs and supporting sustainable initiatives that improve a community's source of clean water, food, healthcare and education for the long-term.



Some Presbyterian Alternatives

- Choose a project from the PCC's Gifts of Change catalogue (presbyterian.ca/gifts-of-change). These projects have been specifically selected to help make a real difference in Canada and around the world.
- Encourage youth to participate in PWS&D's Sunday School Challenge. The Sunday School Challenge encourages youth to raise money for a specific PWS&D project that helps address hunger, poverty and injustice across the globe.
- Study and learn about the important work of overseas staff with International Ministries, and how your donation to *Presbyterians Sharing* supports these assignments (presbyterian.ca/missionstaff).
- Visit PWS&D's website (WeRespond.ca) and support an emergency appeal that is current and has urgent need.

