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Local, area churches collecting boxes of gifts for Operation Christmas Child as a way to share Christianity with the less fortunate around the world

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

Since 1993, more than 100 million boys and girls in more than 130 countries have experienced God's love through the power of simple shoebox gifts from Operation Christmas Child.

OCC was created in 1990 by Dave Welsh and Jill Cooke for children in Romania. Welsh later contacted Franklin Graham, son of the Rev. Billy Graham to ask if he'd like to assist in getting more shoeboxes packed for children in Eastern Europe.

Franklin Graham came through after partnering with a church and others. Dave Welsh later stopped OCC because it got too big for him, but Graham would continue on as president of the “global Christmas gift exchange” project from Samaritan’s Purse.

Samaritan’s Purse works with local churches and ministry partners to deliver the gifts and share the life-changing Good News of Jesus Christ.

Each November, OCC opens to thousands of locations, typically at churches or schools, to collect shoeboxes filled with toys, school supplies, personal items and other gifts. Volunteers for OCC begin working in September and finish with a worldwide collection week near the middle of November.

Groups, families and individuals in 11 countries, including the United States, pack shoe boxes with gifts selected for a child of a specific age range and gender (for either a boy or a girl, and either in the 2-4, 5-9 or 10-14 age range), and the most common items placed in the boxes are school supplies, small toys and hygiene products. These boxes are then distributed as Christmas gifts, accompanied by Christian literature.

This year, National Collection Week for OCC is set for Nov. 18-24, and many area churches are participating in the project. First Southern Baptist Church of Liberal is participating in OCC and will serve as the area drop-off for shoeboxes.

Other churches taking part in collecting presents for kids overseas include First Christian Church of Hugoton, Hooker’s Gospel of Grace Church, South Church of God in Liberal, Emmanuel Southern Baptist of Liberal, Church For All Nations of Liberal and First Baptist Church of Liberal.

The boxes are taken to the Samaritan's Purse headquarters in Boone, N.C., and will be delivered to children worldwide.

The boxes are collected by Samaritan’s Purse and shipped to developing countries, where they are distributed mostly by National Leadership Teams of local evangelical pastors and followers

drawn from religious, government and community organizations.

For more information, call First Southern Baptist at 624-0186.

Gift suggestions

TOYS: Include items that children will immediately embrace such as dolls, toy trucks, stuffed animals, kites, harmonicas, yo-yos, jump ropes, balls, toys that light up and make noise (with extra batteries), etc.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES: Pens, pencils and sharpeners, compass or rulers, science and math pads, writing pads or paper, solar calculators, coloring and picture books, etc.

HYGIENE ITEMS: Toothbrush, mild bar soap (in a plastic bag), comb, washcloth, etc.

ACCESSORIES: T-shirts, socks, ball caps, sunglasses, hair clips, toy jewelry, watches, flashlights (with extra batteries).

A PERSONAL NOTE: You may enclose a note to the child and a photo of yourself or your family. If you include your name and address, the child may write back.

DO NOT INCLUDE: Used or damaged items, war-related items such as toy guns, knives or military figures, alcohol or food, out-of-date candy, liquid or flammable medications or vitamins, breakable items such as snow globes or glass containers, aerosol cans.

How to pack a shoebox

SHOEBOX
Use an empty cardboard or plastic shoebox (average size). You can wrap the box, if separately, but wrapping is not required.

BOY OR GIRL
Decide whether your gift will be for a boy or a girl and the age category: 2-4, 5-9, or 10-14. Download and print the appropriate boy/girl label, attach the correct age category and tape the label to the top of your box.

FILL WITH GIFTS
Fill the box with a variety of gifts that will bring delight to a child (see Gift Suggestions below).

INCLUDE \$7 DONATION PER BOX
Help cover shipping and other costs related to delivering your shoeboxes to children overseas by donating \$7 for each gift you prepare. You can go online to discover the destination of your box. Or, you can write a check to Samaritan's Trust (note "SCT" on the memo line) and place it in an envelope on top of the items inside your shoebox. If you are preparing multiple gifts, please make one combined donation. Note: Follow Star Box or 99¢ available through online giving.

DROP OFF
Place a rubber band around each closed shoebox and bring it to the drop-off location nearest you (using National Collection Week, November 28-29). Use our Drop-off Locations page to find the closest collection site. Or, call 1-800-333-5949.

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