



# Christmas COMPASSION:

Fifteen ways to give  
a gift that makes  
a difference this  
holiday season

By Ashli O'Connell

**The spirit of giving** is a natural part of the Christmas season, and many will find themselves open to compassionate outreach in the weeks ahead. The problem is, people don't always know what to do to help those in need. Here are 15 ideas of activities that families can do together to make a difference in the lives of others this Christmas. (See page 24 for 10 more ideas that can be carried out without spending a dime.)

The following list is not tied exclusively to the holidays. Consider designating one idea for every month of the year — and keep Christmas compassion alive all year long.

- 1.** Donate new toys, books or videos to a hospital pediatric floor. The gifts can be used in two ways — to be kept by the hospital staff to be used with children who come and go throughout the year, or to be wrapped and given to children who spend their holidays in the hospital. Staff at your local hospital can let you know how best they can use such gifts.
- 2.** Take up a collection and purchase snow boots or warm shoes for every child in a local homeless shelter.
- 3.** Buy your Christmas greeting cards from a community or church group. Many groups raise funds by selling their own cards. This is an easy way to help out and give something different and meaningful to friends and family.
- 4.** Raise funds to donate to a school library in a low-income part of town. New books are a consistent need in school libraries.

# 10 ways you can help the needy (without spending a dime)

Do you think you have nothing to give? Think again!

## 1. Be a servant.

Volunteer for an agency that is meeting the needs of the poor. You could serve meals at a soup kitchen, organize shelves at a food pantry or pass out groceries at a Convoy of Hope event.

## 2. Teach someone to read.

Illiteracy and lack of education often keep people in poverty. Local literacy councils need volunteers to work with adults who are learning to read.

## 3. Open your home to children.

There are many struggling single parents who would welcome an offer for a few hours of free childcare. This might give them an opportunity to attend a job interview, run errands or take a much-needed break from the daily stresses of managing a family.

## 4. Give something away.

Even if you can't donate money, you probably have something in your home that could bless a needy family. For instance, that extra suit jacket in the closet could help outfit someone for a job interview. Toys, bicycles and baby equipment — as long as they're still in good shape — could all be passed on to someone in need. Take inventory of your home, and think about what you could give.

## 5. Share your ride.

Many low-income families are without reliable transportation or find it hard to pay high gas prices. Consider offering a ride to a needy person who works at or near your place of employment. In addition to helping a neighbor, you may find that you enjoy the company during your daily commute.

## 6. Be a mentor.

Mentor someone who is trying to build a better life. Make yourself available as a friend, an adviser, a role model, a prayer partner and a good listener.

## 7. Plant a garden.

Though it requires an initial small investment, you can actually save money by growing your own produce. As a bonus, you'll likely end up with a surplus that you can share with some needy families in your church or community.

## 8. Be an advocate.

People who need help often lack the time, education or resources to explore all the available options. Be an advocate by helping connect them with churches, charitable organizations and employment agencies in your community.

## 9. Encourage kindness.

Children from low-income households are often the targets of cruelty from their peers. Teach your kids that God loves everyone equally, regardless of appearance or status. Encourage them to show Christ's love by being kind to others and speaking up for children who are ostracized or teased.

## 10. Share Christ.

Nothing is of greater eternal value than leading people to Christ. As you reach out in compassion and invest in the lives of those around you, you will develop relationships and discover opportunities for sharing Christ's transforming message.

— Christina Quick



## Whatever your professional or trade skills, chances are a local ministry or community group needs them.

**5.** Collect new baby clothes and items for a crisis pregnancy center.

**6.** As a family, empty your piggy banks and collect all the loose change in your house. Count and roll the change together — serve hot chocolate and popcorn and make a party of it. Once you've collected and counted the money, decide as a family how it will be donated. This activity doubles as a good math lesson for young children.

**7.** Adults and teens over age 17 can donate blood together. In some states, teens as young as 16 can give.

**8.** Take your children to visit a nursing home. Read to and visit with residents. Go back and visit regularly.

**9.** Organize a Christmas party for children at a community center after-school program.

**10.** Make Christmas the time for your family members to register as organ donors.

**11.** Donate your expertise to make a difference. Consider whether you or your business could provide pro bono assistance to a ministry or community group. It may be legal advice, accounting, auditing, marketing, public relations or IT knowledge — or landscaping, carpentry or bricklaying skills. Whatever your professional or trade skills, chances are a local ministry or community group needs them.

**12.** Put your old Christmas decorations to good use. Rally co-workers or friends to help decorate a local shelter

or community center or perhaps a new church. Children can help by making their own decorations.

**13.** As a family, adopt an elderly neighbor or shut-in. Bake cookies, shovel his or her walk and driveway, run Christmas errands and look for ways to help in general. Invite the adopted neighbor to join your family in Christmas activities.

**14.** Make others a part of your family Christmas celebrations. Many single and widowed people live far from family or do not have family to celebrate with. The holidays can be a lonely time for many people.

**15.** Treating your family to a new computer this Christmas? Donate the old one to a good cause. There are organizations that will take your old PCs, refurbish them and distribute them to disadvantaged schools, families and community groups.

These ideas are only a sampling of the many worthy activities a family can do together to impact the lives of those around them. Use Christmastime as an opportunity to pray as a family and decide how best to utilize your time and resources. For a list of Assemblies of God ministries that accept donations, visit [ag.org](http://ag.org) and click on the "Contributions" link. ■

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E-mail your comments to [pe@ag.org](mailto:pe@ag.org).

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