

Good News. Great Joy.



Operation Christmas Child: A Guide for Parents and Teachers

Introduction

Since 1990, more than 100 million boys and girls in over 130 countries have experienced God's love through the power of simple shoebox gifts from **Operation Christmas Child**. Samaritan's Purse works with local churches and ministry partners to deliver the gifts and share the life-changing Good News of Jesus Christ.

We always give shoeboxes to children based on need, regardless of their background or religious beliefs; each gift-filled shoebox is an unconditional gift of love.

Where appropriate, with each shoebox, our church partners on the ground may offer a little book of Bible stories; **The Greatest Gift**.

They may also give children receiving gift-filled shoeboxes the opportunity to participate in **The Greatest Journey** discipleship programme, subject to the consent of their parents, carers or guardians, with 'no strings attached'.



The mission of **Operation Christmas Child** is to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children around the world and, together with the local Church worldwide, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.



Since 1990, **Operation Christmas Child** – an initiative of the Christian relief and development agency Samaritan's Purse – has been blessing underprivileged children around the world with gift-filled shoeboxes wrapped and packed by children and adults in the UK.

It's a campaign that thousands of schools, churches and other organisations from across the UK get involved with between the September and November each year. In fact, it is now the UK's largest children's Christmas appeal.

The idea is simple. Children and adults wrap and pack shoeboxes with a range of gifts and take to a convenient 'drop-off point'. We collect these gift-filled shoeboxes and, after processing for export purposes, we send them overseas where local churches distribute them to children, on the basis of need alone. Each shoebox is an unconditional gift, given to a child with nothing asked for, or expected in return; no pledges, no obligation to go to church or attend classes; 'no strings attached'

These shoebox gifts are an expression of God's love to us, and the gift of His Son Jesus at Christmas. They give local churches the opportunity to show God's love to children in a tangible way and, during the distribution event, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, perhaps through age-appropriate music, dance and puppet shows, or through a little book of Bible stories distributed with their shoebox, not inside it:

The Greatest Gift.



A Life Touched

Them bani is 11 years old. His mother and father passed away some years ago, so Them bani now lives with his eight brothers and sisters high up in the hills of rural Swaziland, near South Africa.

When **Operation Christmas Child** came to his village, Them bani and each of his brothers and sisters received a shoebox filled with presents. "I really enjoyed opening the box," said Them bani. "I've never received anything like this before."

Them bani's favourite gifts were his notebook, pens, and socks. "I love the notebook," he said. "I am going to write in it all the time."

An hour after the shoebox distribution, Them bani sat in the doorway of his home avidly drawing and writing in his new notebook. When asked how he felt about the gifts, he said, "I'm so happy, I'm tongue-tied!"

The gift that Them bani received was more than just a shoebox. It was the gift of education, and toys so he could be a child again. It was also a gift of love at Christmas, and the gift of hope for the future.

The hope is there because the same church that gave Them bani his shoebox has also been supported by Samaritan's Purse to care for him and his siblings – providing them with food, clothing and ongoing loving care.

That's the power of a shoebox gift – a gift that enabled an adult or child in the UK (who created it) and a local church in Swaziland (who distributed it) to touch the life of a child in need.



The Greatest Journey

The Greatest Journey is a voluntary follow-up course for children who have received shoeboxes through **Operation Christmas Child**, enabling them to interact with the Gospel, through Bible stories and Bible teaching.

The mission of **The Greatest Journey** is to help local churches overseas reach children with the Gospel, to establish them in their faith in Jesus Christ and to equip them to pray for and share the Gospel with their family and friends.



The Greatest Journey is a series of 12 lessons containing exciting Biblical content exclusively delivered and presented by trained volunteers from local churches, with training and all resources needed provided free of charge, at their request. Through this programme local believers are being empowered and enabled to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with children in their own communities.

Children completing **The Greatest Journey** are awarded a personal certificate and many will receive a special copy of the New Testament in their own language, which also contains Old Testament stories, colourful illustrations, memory verses and other learning aids. In many countries around the world, Bibles are rare, or hard to obtain; these Bibles become instant treasures, not only to the children receiving them but to their friends and families as well.

Not all children receiving shoeboxes will want, or be able to participate in **The Greatest Journey**, either by reason of their own free will, because there are no trained teachers in their locality to take the classes, or because resources for the children are not yet available - either in their local language or in sufficient quantities.

Why we Speak of Hope



In accordance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN, and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, we are committed to religious freedom as a fundamental human right. Thus, every person has the right to form their own religious convictions or ideological commitment - free and undisturbed - and to exercise their religion or belief and act according to its laws, including advertising it.

As a Christian organisation, our work is motivated by our Christian convictions and allows for the direct or indirect explanation of the foundations of our faith. *However, and vitally, we reject any form of coercion, manipulation or exploitation of an emergency or a person's situation in order to share our faith.*

In accordance with Article 14 of the UN Children's Convention we "respect the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion".

As Christians, as part of the worldwide Church of God, we believe that charity and love are entwined together and therefore we encounter people in need in both word and deed.



Our Commitment to Share our Faith Appropriately, with Respect

We are committed to the code of conduct, jointly produced by the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance, for 'Christian witness in a multi-religious world' on 29th June, 2011.

This is introduced with these words: *"Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to Gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings."*

Why we Talk about our Faith

The desire for vibrant, healthy relationships unites all people. However our reality is often shaped by the hopelessness of disturbed and disrupted relationships. Sustainable, reliable relationships therefore need to be restored.

This begins with our relationship with God, who introduces himself to us in the Bible - and Jesus Christ. By conquering death, Jesus offers renewal and the hope of life beyond death to anyone who wants it.

For us, if we fail to carry this message of hope, which is firmly established in the Bible, it would be like depriving people of the opportunity to hear how their relationship with their Creator can be restored and how they can have hope.

Without this message of hope we can only offer short term help; with it we can offer long term hope. For Samaritan's Purse help and hope go together. **That is why we speak of faith.**