

Operation Christmas Child: FAQ

During the run-up to Christmas, the NSS gets many questions relating to the charity 'shoe box' scheme called 'Operation Christmas Child', which is run by evangelical charity Samaritan's Purse.

Giving to charity is a personal choice. Whether or not one should partake in a particular charitable activity is entirely up to the individual. The same applies to Operation Christmas Child – but before parents and schools decide to contribute to this project, they should be aware of exactly what will happen when they take part.

Here we answer some common questions regarding the scheme.

What is Operation Christmas Child?

Operation Christmas Child is a 'shoebox' scheme which many schools, youth groups, churches, councils and other organisations get involved with during the run-up to Christmas. Donors fill shoeboxes with toys, which are then sent to children in developing countries as 'Christmas presents'. Schools and parents often see the scheme as an opportunity to teach children about the importance of helping those less well-off.

What many participants do not know about the scheme is that its primary goal is to push fundamentalist religion on vulnerable children.

What happens to the boxes next?

Once they arrive at their destination, the shoeboxes are given to children at an "outreach event", together with conversion-focused Christian literature. The children are also encouraged to join a Christian indoctrination programme called "The Greatest Journey". There's more information about this on the [Operation Christmas Child website](#) itself.

Countries with high numbers of Muslims in particular are targeted by Operation Christmas Child.

What's the problem?

It is highly commendable that so many generous people in the UK want to help children in other countries – and that they want to get their own children involved in the important civil responsibility of charitable work.

But what Operation Christmas Child is doing is exploitative. It exploits children and families in poor countries by putting them under pressure to convert to fundamentalist religion. And it exploits children and families in rich countries by using their generosity as a tool for religious conversion. Many people, once they discover how the shoeboxes are used, are rightly horrified and feel duped.

Then there are other considerations, including the environmental impact of flying tons of plastic toys across the world every year. The scheme can also impact the local economy, where local vendors trying to sell their own products must compete with free handouts.

While it may make the donor feel good, filling shoeboxes with plastic trinkets to send overseas is a highly inefficient way to give to charity. Reputable charities usually seek to convert physical

donations into money, because money can be used far more efficiently. Shoebox schemes are a bad idea and no major aid agency supports them.

It is dangerous when charities mix humanitarian work with the promotion of a particular religious or political agenda.

Brendan Paddy (Save the Children)

Who's behind Operation Christmas Child?

Operation Christmas Child is the main activity of Samaritan's Purse, a registered evangelical Christian charity. With an income of over £15.9 million in 2018, it's one of the richest religious charities in the UK. Its president is American missionary Franklin Graham, son of televangelist Billy Graham. Franklin Graham has praised Vladimir Putin's anti-gay laws, said that Muslims "should be barred from immigrating to America," and called on Christians to convert Muslims.

Who supports Operation Christmas Child?

A number of organisations have thankfully acknowledged the unethical nature of using a gift of toys to convert children in poverty to Christianity. OXFAM, DHL, the Inland Revenue and the Co-Op have all withdrawn their support for Operation Christmas Child for this reason. Even other Christian groups have expressed serious concern.

In 2015, following [advice](#) from the NSS, Girlguiding UK confirmed that they do not support Operation Christmas Child.

But unfortunately there are still many other schools, organisations and individuals who support the scheme, unaware of its exact nature.

As an organisation our official stance is that Girlguiding does not support the Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child initiative and is not encouraging groups to support this or any other any specific charitable initiatives during the festive period. Girlguiding groups around the UK often fundraise and support local or national charities that are important to the girls. There is an expectation that all the activities of Girlguiding groups are rooted in our charity values, which are: inclusive, fun, caring, empowering, challenging and inspiring.

Girlguiding UK

What alternatives are there?

Fortunately, Samaritan's Purse and Operation Christmas Child are exceptions rather than the rule. There are many more charities, operating both in the UK and abroad, that do genuine good. These include but are in no ways limited to:

- [Good Gifts](#)
- [Oxfam Unwrapped](#)
- [Plan UK - Sponsor a Child](#)

- [Save the Children](#)

Schools and parents shouldn't let unethical schemes like Operation Christmas Child discourage them from getting children involved in charitable giving. However, they may wish to take a close look at exactly where their donation goes and how it is used, to make an informed decision about how their goodwill can have a genuinely positive impact on the world.

My local school/council/church etc. is participating in Operation Christmas Child. What can I do?

We've made [a template letter](#) you can use to urge your school, workplace or society to find a more ethical, educational and effective alternative to Operation Christmas Child. [You can download it here.](#)

Where can I go for more information?

We've published a number of blogs about Operation Christmas Child:

- [Operation Christmas Child: Does its charity benefit the public?](#)
- [Operation Christmas Child: Christian fundamentalism, gift-wrapped](#)
- [Advice for parents wanting to give the evangelical Operation Christmas Child shoebox scheme a wide berth](#)
- [Operation Christmas Child: an analysis](#)
- [Enticing children to evangelism with toys: Samaritan's Purse shoebox scheme](#)

Other organisations and individuals are also campaigning against Operation Christmas Child:

- [7 reasons not to participate in Operation Christmas Child](#)
- [Why parents shouldn't support 'Operation Christmas Child'](#)
- [Operation Christmas Child Alert UK – campaign site](#)
- [Is Operation Christmas Child's shoebox campaign just a propaganda tool for Christianity?](#)

Download a template letter

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- [Download](#)

[The Operation Christmas Child shoebox scheme aims to convert vulnerable children to fundamentalist Christianity. Find out more.](#)

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