

Ideas For Your Church

Below are some great, fun ideas to help your church get the most out of your OCC experience.

Goal - Have the church (and/or each group) set a goal for the number of children you want to reach.

- Have some type of visual indicator as to how close they are to the goal.
- Visuals are important, so count each box toward the goal (i.e. We have now collected 68 of 100 boxes).
- A variation would be to have a countdown until all shoe box gifts are collected, reaching the goal.

Kick Off - Have a kick off Sunday for OCC.

- Have empty shoe box gifts already available at the church with brochures.
- Encourage people to fill out a commitment card for how many shoe box gifts they want to fill and they can take that number of boxes.
- Not only does this give the church a goal, but it provides some accountability as well.

Dedication Service - Many churches have dedication services for the shoe box gifts. Ideas....

- Build a tree out of the shoe box gifts to show how many were collected.
- Have one girl and one boy, come up and pray over the gifts during the service.
- As people enter the sanctuary, children carry the gifts to the front of the church. They can use wagons, carts, etc.
- The children can put the shoe box gifts into the cartons.
- The pastor's message can be about giving to the poor, fulfilling the Great Commission, and other lessons on showing the love of Christ to the world.
- Have the congregation dedicate their shoe box gifts - praying that the children and families who receive them would come to know Jesus.

Children's Sermon - A great children's sermon is to take an empty shoe box and ask the kids, "How many of these boxes would it take to hold everything in your bedroom?"

- Most kids will say 500 or 1000, etc. Remind them that the children receiving these boxes do not have anything. This helps a child

understand just how needy the kids receiving the gifts really are.

- Another children's sermon idea is to have an empty box and a full box. Build it around the idea that we would choose the box full of items, but that the children receiving the shoe box gifts have nothing.

Item Of The Month - Encourage church members to donate one item each month to be used for shoe box gifts or as filler items.

- Some churches use this as an opportunity to collect shoe box gift items and then assemble them at the end of the year, while others use these items as extra filler items they deliver to the Processing Center with their shoe box gifts.

Packing Party - Have a "Packing Party" at your church.

- Groups can begin by going on shopping trips to purchase items for gift boxes.
- Everyone can bring their shoe box gift items and assemble them together.
- Have a Polaroid camera on hand to take pictures of those people who did not already have their picture in their shoe box gift.
- This can be a joint activity with a group's own children or another children's group from the church.

Vacation Bible School - VBS is an excellent time to collect shoe box gifts for OCC.

- Have the children bring a different item each day and then assemble the gifts at the end of the week.
- Poster, banner, or flag-making contests with the OCC theme.
- Friendly competition - class that collects the most shoe box gifts wins an ice cream party or other prize.
- Essay contests with a theme like, "If I had never received a single Christmas gift..."
- *Certificates of Participation* - Downloadable from www.samaritanspurse.org
- Each child can fill out and color the "All About Me" pages to include in his/her shoebox - Downloadable from www.samaritanspurse.org

OCC Tree - Have an "OCC Tree."

- Prepare labels with the gender and age group already marked.
- Hang the labels on the tree for people to take.
- As the boxes are turned back in, they can be placed under the tree.

Photos, Cards And Letter - Encourage people to put pictures, cards and letters to the children in their shoe box gifts. We hear story after story of how the children who receive them love the personal interaction from the person sending their gift. Create cards for the children to enclose with the gifts.

- Have the children paint their handprint on a card. It will read, "This is my hand. When you place your hand on mine, think about me. I prayed for you to get this box."

Bulletin Board - Have a church bulletin board to display copies of letters that members have received from children that received their shoe box gifts.

Missions Fairs/Conferences-

- Have an OCC booth at the annual church missions fair.
- Promote OCC at district or area meetings of their denomination or church association.
- Promote OCC at the local mall, county fair, etc.
- Tie in OCC with a church's annual mission's week/conference or with their annual hunger/poverty awareness event.

Musicals/Skits – Incorporate OCC into your worship service through music.

- Song-writing contests with a theme like, "If I had never received a single Christmas gift..."
- Create an original skit with a Christmas/OCC theme.
- Inform church youth music directors of the *Operation Christmas Child – A Kid's Musical* from Word Music.

Testimonies - When promoting OCC from the pulpit, it is great to share spiritual impact stories.

- Some stories are found in the information kit, on the regional sheet, and in the handbook.

Make OCC a Family Activity-

- Encourage moms and dads to participate with their sons and daughters in a hands-on mission project.
- Serve at the local OCC shoe box drop-off location.
- Serve at the Regional Processing Center (for youths 13 and older).
- Help promote OCC to new churches by offering to use your trucks and vans to come pick up shoe box gifts collected by first-time churches.

In Honor or Memory Of - Have a program in your church to do a shoe box in honor or memory of someone.

- Create a card that would be filled out in the person's honor or memory and then the card would be placed in the shoe box.
- Send a card to the person you are honoring or memorializing as well.
- Instead of giving Christmas gifts to family members, fill a shoe box gift in their honor or memory.

Involve the Homebound (Kids and Seniors Together) - If there are homebound members in the church who want to participate, but cannot get out, have them donate money for shoe box gifts. Some elder members of the church may not be homebound, but may have a hard time assembling a shoe box gift by themselves.

- The youth in the church can go out in groups and buy items to fill the boxes.
- Each group would be given the same amount of money to go out and see how many boxes they can fill.
- Make this an intergenerational program by having the youth go with an older person and they can pack the shoe box together.

Wrapping - Have Sunday school classes, senior groups, etc. start collecting and wrapping empty shoe box gifts.

- These can be handed out later in the year to people who do not have easy access to shoe box gifts, or may have a hard time wrapping one.

Christmas In July or "Half-way to Christmas" Parties-

- This works well because many back to school items and end of summer items are on sale.