

Going Beyond Christmas

Every Christmas, ministry partners like yours help brighten the lives of hundreds of thousands of children nationwide through Angel Tree[®], a program of Prison Fellowship[®]. By delivering gifts to prisoners' children, you help restore and strengthen family relationships and share the true meaning of Christmas—the Good News of Jesus Christ.

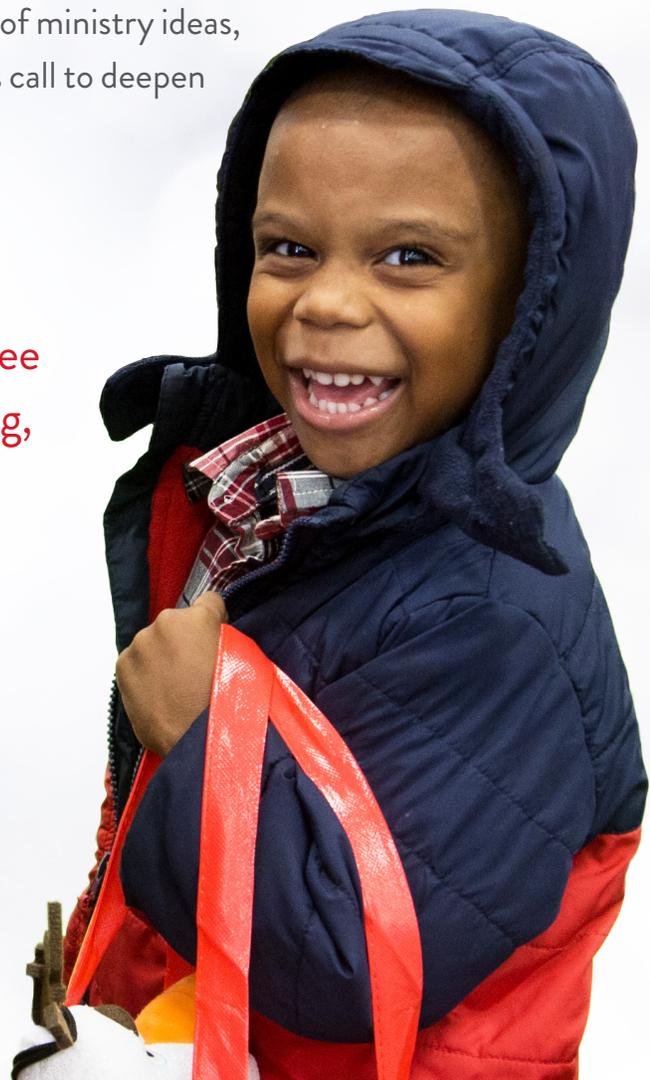
But Angel Tree doesn't have to end with Christmas. That first connection can be the beginning of a rewarding, ongoing relationship with prisoners' families. When you continue your Angel Tree ministry throughout the year, God will grow and challenge your congregation as you help these children and their families grow closer to one another and their Heavenly Father.

There are many opportunities to reach out to Angel Tree families and enfold them in the life of your church. This handbook offers a variety of ministry ideas, programs, and resources that can help you answer God's call to deepen your ministry in ways that make sense for your church.

The connection you make through Angel Tree Christmas can be the beginning of rewarding, ongoing ministry to prisoners' families.



ANGEL TREE[®]
A Program of Prison Fellowship



Family Embraced™ – A Training Toolkit for Congregations

Over the past three decades, countless churches and organizations have partnered with Angel Tree to welcome and encourage prisoners' families.

Prison Fellowship developed the Family Embraced toolkit to help ministry partners that have served families through Angel Tree Christmas make an even greater investment in their lives. It includes a flexible, easy-to-use combination of videos, facilitated small-group discussions, and group activities, plus information and ideas to equip your congregation to effectively respond to needs and have a more meaningful ministry. This toolkit is a great place to start if you want to better understand what Angel Tree families might face day to day.

To order your toolkit today, please call 800.55.ANGEL (26435).

Steps to Expanding Your Angel Tree Ministry Beyond Christmas

If you are planning a specific event for Angel Tree families, following a few basic steps can enhance your success and lead to a lasting impact in the lives of those who attend.

- 1 Pray** for God's guidance and blessing.
- 2 Engage a group of volunteers** to assist in the planning so that all responsibilities do not fall to one person.
- 3 Determine the scope of your event or activity.** Will it be a one-time event or ongoing outreach? Is there something your church is already doing that fits? Planning an event around existing resources is often easier than trying to find resources to start something new.
- 4** Prior to each event, **determine how many people you want to invite** and recruit enough volunteers so the event runs smoothly.
- 5** **Select the date and invite the caregivers and children** with adequate lead time.
- 6** **Share the Gospel** and Jesus Christ's message of love with the children and their families while hosting the event or activity.

Different Ways to Extend Your Ministry

Existing Church Ministries

Invite Angel Tree children and caregivers to join in your church's existing youth or adult ministries, Vacation Bible School (VBS), and special worship services, events, and activities.

Back-to-School Events

Determine the gender, grade, and number of children you wish to serve and purchase the required school supplies. You can fill backpacks with these supplies and distribute them at the church. Providing extra support during the start of a new school year relieves caregivers from added financial pressures and ensures children have the supplies they need.

Family Fun Day

With food, moon bounces, face painting, games, and other activities, a family fun day is a way to introduce Angel Tree families to other families in your church. It's a time to get together to relax, meet new people, and build deeper relationships.

Caregivers' Night Out

An opportunity to get a break and enjoy the company of other adults is usually a rare and welcome luxury for those caring for children with an incarcerated parent. Organize on-site daycare for the children and consider having the initial Caregivers' Night Out at the church in order to decrease potential anxieties associated with leaving the children.

Letter Writing

Writing letters is often the best form of communication between children and their incarcerated parents. It is less expensive than phone calls and allows both the child and parent to think through what they want to say to each other. Angel Tree offers a downloadable Letter Writing Kit on our website at prisonfellowship.org/resources/going-beyond-christmas/ministry-ideas/ to help facilitate the process. Consider using the kit during a back-to-school event or Angel Tree Christmas party. Be sure to obtain each parent's Department of Corrections number and mailing address for the facility, and find out what rules and restrictions the prison has for sending mail.

Prison Visits

Parental visits are an important tool for family reconciliation. However, facilitating visits can be difficult for the caregiving parent. Prisons are often very far from where the families live. There is often no public transportation available, and the cost of gas can be prohibitive. Providing transportation for prison visits can be a powerful ministry. In order to be effective, you must communicate with the caregiver and with the prison to determine available visiting days, the parent's status for visitation, clearance requirements, and other rules for visits. Consider bringing the caregiver along for the first few visits to support the child and reduce any fears and anxiety. Provide opportunities for the child and parent to talk about their experience afterward.

Some units are now providing video visitation. While visiting in person is always better, there is also an opportunity for a ministry partner to help families with virtual visits, since not all families have computers with webcams.

Help Kids Find Jesus Through Summer Camp

Another way to extend your Angel Tree ministry throughout the year is to arrange for prisoners' children to attend a Christian summer camp. Camp can be one of the most life-changing experiences that children of incarcerated parents have. Angel Tree Camping® puts the joy of summer in reach for prisoners' children, who have a chance to experience God's love, make new friends, and build relationships with caring counselors.

It's often at camp that many children make a first-time decision to trust in Jesus Christ or deepen their relationship with Him. The growth that begins at camp is reinforced and nurtured when your church provides follow-up support for the kids after they return.

OTHER IDEAS INCLUDE:

Providing inspirational books or magazine subscriptions, caregiver Christmas gifts, Thanksgiving Day cards, or food baskets

Starting an after-school or tutoring program

Sending birthday cards to the children

Identifying and meeting specific needs (food/meals, house painting, etc.)

If your church has a camp it attends, consider bringing Angel Tree kids along with the rest of your youth.

If your church does not already use a summer camp, Angel Tree will help to connect you with Angel Tree partnering camps or other nearby camps accredited by the Christian Camping and Conference Association (CCCA). Or you can check with the CCCA at www.ccca.org/ccca/Discover.asp to find an accredited Christian camp in your area.

Angel Tree provides guidance and resources so that you can explain the benefits of camp to the children's caregivers, complete the sign-up process, and help provide any supplies the kids will need for camp. You can request a supply of quality tote bags and Bibles at no charge, one for every child you sponsor. The tote bags can be filled by your church volunteers with basic camping necessities like sunscreen, bug spray, and toiletries.

Prison Fellowship provides scholarship funds to help get these children to camp. To find out how Angel Tree Camping can help, contact us as at 800.55.ANGEL (26435).

To receive more information about getting started with camping contact us at **800.55.ANGEL (26435)** or email us at angeltreecamping@pfm.org.

Extend a Helping Hand Through Mentoring

With the help of our partners, Angel Tree can assist your church in starting your own mentoring program or link you with effective programs that already exist in your community.

Mentors and their youth can do all kinds of things together. They can go to concerts, sporting events, amusement parks, or the swimming pool. They can fly kites, build model airplanes, take a karate class together, have a Bible study, go out to eat, or do a community service project. And most important, they get to know each other—by watching, talking, and listening.

Angel Tree has established collaborative relationships with mentoring organizations in many communities. These organizations have a desire to serve children of prisoners and want to work with the local church to find mentors. They also have expertise in running mentoring programs full-time and supporting their volunteers.

The most effective mentoring programs match a child with an adult Christian mentor of the same sex. These matches last at least one year, and the two spend time together weekly. The adult is not expected to be the child's savior, therapist, surrogate parent, or peer. The mentor is meant to be a Christ-like friend, coach, confidant, and role model.

Whether you decide to pursue a formal mentoring program or not, there are opportunities to mentor informally that can develop out of other events or ministries that impact Angel Tree families.

One-to-One Faith-Based Mentoring DVD

Prison Fellowship developed the One-to-One Faith-Based Mentoring DVD to inspire and equip Christian mentors to better understand and address the unique issues facing children of incarcerated parents.

Angel Tree Collaborators

Angel Tree has partnerships with nonprofit and faith-based organizations that provide unique and creative ministry opportunities, as well as information and resources to help your church more effectively minister to the children and families of prisoners year-round. For information about current ministry partners, please contact us at 800.55.ANGEL (26435).

Share Your Angel Tree Story With Us

Your stories are an inspiration and encouragement to us and the thousands of other Angel Tree ministry partners and volunteers that are serving children and families across the country. Let us celebrate with you by sharing your story! Visit our website at angeltree.org and follow the links to “Share Your Story.”

GOING BEYOND CHRISTMAS ALREADY?

Have you already begun to extend your ministry beyond Christmas? We'd love to hear about what you're doing so we can better equip other ministry partners to serve prisoners' families year-round too. Visit angeltree.org and follow the links to “Share Your Story” to tell us how.

Visit our website for program updates, tools, and resources at
prisonfellowship.org/resources/angel-tree

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