

# HELPFUL HINTS

## for a Successful Angel Tree® Program



### Table of Contents

How to Reach Angel Tree .....	2
Geographic Area Requests .....	2
Guidelines and Suggestions .....	3
Locating Children .....	3
Other Ways to Locate Children .....	3
Angel Tree Christmas Gift Guide .....	4
Gifts for the Children .....	4
Delivery .....	4
Things to Keep in Mind When Encountering Angel Tree Families .....	5
Ministering to the Prisoner .....	6
Ideas to Keep in Touch with Your Angels .....	6
Reports .....	6
Some Tough Questions .....	7



## How to Reach Angel Tree

We will be happy to answer any questions or concerns regarding your Angel Tree program. You can reach your Angel Tree specialist by calling 1.800.55.ANGEL (26435).

## Geographic Area Requests

We have tried to provide assignments in your requested geographical area. If you have been assigned fewer children than you requested, and you would be willing to serve children in areas other than those listed on your registration form, please let us know.

*If you feel uncertain about serving these families after reviewing your list, we ask you to notify your Angel Tree specialist immediately! We will try to find churches or organizations to assist in the delivery of gifts. Although it is not the preferred method of delivery, you may, if necessary, mail gifts with age-appropriate Gospel literature if the children are not within a reasonable delivery area.*

Below are some guidelines to assist you during the preparation and shipping process:

- Request gift ideas from caregivers by making a phone call or, if time permits, by sending a letter. (You can use the phone script available on the Angel Tree website at [prisonfellowship.org/resources/angel-tree/churchcoordinatormaterials](http://prisonfellowship.org/resources/angel-tree/churchcoordinatormaterials).) Use this as an opportunity to let the caregiver know that you (or your church) will be sending gifts to the children. Explain why you will be shipping the packages. For example, you wanted to participate in Angel Tree and there was a need to help cover children who are not in your area. Please mention that you are excited about purchasing the gifts even though you will not be able to deliver them in person.
- Since you will be shipping the gifts, ask for gift ideas that will be conducive to shipping. We suggest one gift per child, going with the suggested gift type that the incarcerated parent provided, if it is practical for shipping. If the caregiver suggests an alternate gift, feel free to accept their suggestion. Gift should be valued at approximately \$20.
- Be sure to confirm the address and make sure that it is a good shipping/ mailing address. UPS does not deliver to Post Office boxes.
- Distribute the angel tags with the gift ideas to members of your congregation or those who will be shopping. Or if giving gift cards, specify which type of gift card and for how much. For example, “Target for \$20.”
- When you put the angels on the trees, you can add angel tags with “donation to cover shipping costs” to the tree to cover the shipping costs. These angels should have a specific dollar amount (e.g. \$10) on them. You will need to discuss how the donations will be handled (check/cash) with the church leadership.
- Once you know how many families/children you will ship gifts to, start collecting boxes from local stores. Grocery stores are usually a good source. You may need to call ahead to see if and when boxes are available. If storage is a problem, you can break the boxes down until you need them.
- Be sure you have some address labels (with the church as the return address), carton sealing tape, and some newspaper or blank newsprint to use in packing the boxes.
- Assemble a team of volunteers to help with the sorting and packaging of the gifts.
- Please include a card/note to the children to let them know that the gifts are given on behalf of their dad

or mom in the name of Jesus.

- You can use whatever method you choose to ship or mail the packages. If time allows, mailing is usually a little cheaper.
- Be sure to call or send a note (postcard) to the caregiver once the package is shipped. Let them know they should be on the watch for it. You can have the package shipped “confirm delivery” for a small fee.
- Send a note to the incarcerated parent to let him/her know that you purchased gifts (you can mention what you purchased) for his/her child. Please feel free to share the Gospel or a brief reason about why you were glad to do this. These parents are very thankful to have someone care about them and their children. You can use this as an opportunity to minister to the incarcerated parent.

## Guidelines and Suggestions

We recommend that you, as your church’s coordinator, refer to your church resource kit often. It contains a wealth of information about preparation, volunteer recruitment, gift delivery, evangelism, and ministry beyond Christmas.

## Locating Children

This is often the most difficult aspect of the Angel Tree ministry. Challenges associated with contacting families may be due to frequent and recent moves which the incarcerated parent is unaware of, disconnected phone numbers, or lack of response from the families. Keep trying—DON’T GET DISCOURAGED! Utilize the sample letter and/or phone scripts available online ([prisonfellowship.org/resources/angel-tree/churchcoordinatormaterials](https://prisonfellowship.org/resources/angel-tree/churchcoordinatormaterials)) in this critical part of the process. Please note this is also part of the process where you are able to validate the child’s relationship to the incarcerated parent, as well as to confirm appropriate gift wishes for your Angel Tree children, and lay the foundation for a Christ-centered relationship between your church and the Angel Tree families.

Are you contacting the caregivers by mail? Be sure to provide the telephone number of the church. Be sure to identify yourself as an Angel Tree volunteer with \_\_\_\_\_ Church. We **strongly** recommend you start making contact with families immediately! Confirm the address and set up a time for delivery. It will be helpful if you contact the caregiver **again** just before the date agreed upon.

**Note: Due to the difficult circumstances that many Angel Tree families face, the incarcerated parent may not have the best contact information. Families also move frequently. Angel Tree has given you all of the information that the prisoner has provided. If we receive updates from the prisoner, we will pass those on to you. Sadly, you may not be able to find all of the children every year.**

## Other Ways to Locate Children

If there is not a working phone number listed on the application, write a letter (see sample letter online at [prisonfellowship.org/resources/angel-tree/churchcoordinatormaterials](https://prisonfellowship.org/resources/angel-tree/churchcoordinatormaterials)). Mark “**Return Service Requested**” on the envelope. In the letter:

- Request the phone number of the caregiver, a corrected address, and the children’s gift wishes.
- Ask for a delivery date and time.

- Enclose a self-addressed, stamped return envelope (**use your church address or P.O. Box, not your home address**).
- Provide a “RESPOND BY” date! Make the date early, since they may respond late.

OR

- Contact the local school system to see if the children are enrolled; they may help with addresses or phone numbers if you explain the Angel Tree program.
- Contact your local **Department of Children, Youth and Families**; they may help you with a current address if you explain the Angel Tree program.
- Check online resources (e.g., whitepages.com) where you can search for the family by either phone or address.

## Angel Tree Christmas Gift Guide

Angel Tree Christmas is about sharing the love of Jesus Christ and reconnecting parents and children. Angel Tree provides a gift guide for incarcerated parents, enabling them to become more involved in their families’ Christmas by choosing a toy gift category for their child or children. Selections are found on your child assignment report. Volunteers should confirm with the caregivers that the toy category selected by the incarcerated parent is appropriate for the child. Caregivers may suggest a clothing gift as an alternative to a toy.

## Gifts for the Children

Again, each child should receive either a toy or an article of clothing. **Try to adhere to the guideline of a gift valued at approximately \$20.**

## Delivery

Once you have confirmed the caregiver’s address and time of delivery, involve as many people as possible to make home deliveries. **Go out in teams—never alone!**

**Remember, if the caregiver is not at home at the time of delivery, do not leave gifts at the front or back door, and do not leave them with a neighbor! DO NOT deliver gifts or interact with children in any way if the caregiver is not present.**

Be sensitive to the family’s needs. If you would like to take pictures of the children with their gifts and send them to the incarcerated parent, please get permission prior to your visit.

Note: Photographs are not allowed in some prisons. **Remember to obtain the Prison Fellowship Release Form available online. Have the waivers signed by participants in photos and from the legal guardian of any minor included in the photograph.** Send via fax to Angel Tree at **1.877.281.4129** or via email at **angeltree@pfm.org**.

## Things to Keep in Mind When Encountering Angel Tree Families

1. Be careful speaking about the incarcerated parent; do not mention or discuss the parent's incarcerated status where the child is present.
2. Parents and children may be guarded, so don't be pushy or "preachy"; simply share the love of Christ through your actions and tone.
3. Parties may be a little intimidating. Always remember that home delivery adds a personal touch. Then, the following year, a party may be less daunting to the family.
4. Call 1.800.55.ANGEL (26435) if you believe a family has been "split up." For example, call Angel Tree if you discover that the prisoner has three children all under the care of the same caregiver, and only two are assigned to your church. The other child may have been accidentally assigned to another church.
5. Not everyone will respond. Here are the most common reasons:
  - The caregiver may not want the child(ren) to have contact with the incarcerated parent.
  - The caregiver does not require assistance. (If this is the case, remind her or him that it's not a charity, but is intended to reconnect the child with the incarcerated parent.)
  - They have moved or changed phone numbers.
6. Stick to the \$20 per child rule. Bargain hunt, or ask for donations from those in your church who do not wish to shop for the children, but do wish to help.
7. The gift suggestions are just that—suggestions. Sometimes the incarcerated parent is not fully aware of what the children need. Make sure to ask the caregiver if the gift selection reflects the child's current needs and desires, or if a different gift may suit the child better at this time.
8. Some families do not participate because:
  - They are embarrassed
  - The children do not know that their parent is in prison
  - They want nothing to do with the prisoner
  - The prisoner has a restraining order barring contact with the children
  - The children have been adopted by another family
  - The children have never had any contact with the parent in the past
  - The mother has a new husband or boyfriend
  - The children on the application are not the prisoner's children
  - The family responded too late to calls and letters from the church
  - The family could not be found
  - The family did not respond to letters
  - The family moved to another state

## Ministering to the Prisoner

Angel Tree is not just a ministry to the family; it is also a ministry to the incarcerated parent. We strongly encourage you to write to the prisoner to tell him or her if you were successful in delivering gifts to the child. A Christmas card is a great way to do this. This communication is very helpful to the prisoner because it lets him/her know the outcome of his/her application and establishes a connection with a local church. Be sure to use your church's address or a post office box as the return address, and to include the prisoner's Department of Corrections ID number after his/her name on the envelope.

To confirm the prisoner's location, you can use the following Department of Corrections websites. **We suggest contacting the facility to verify the facility's mailing restrictions as well.**

Federal Bureau of Prisons: [www.bop.gov/inmateloc/](http://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/)

State prisons: [theinmatelocator.com](http://theinmatelocator.com)

## Ideas to Keep in Touch with Your Angels

1. Send a birthday card.
2. Include the children in your church's summer activities—Vacation Bible School, backyard camps, residential camps, etc.
3. Develop a mentoring program in your church, matching Angel Tree children with caring adults.
4. Host an Angel Tree Easter party or a back-to-school event for the children.
5. Keep in touch with caregivers:
  - Visit them periodically
  - Invite them to church, small groups, or Bible studies
  - Ask if you can add them to your church mailing list
6. Become pen pals with the children or their parents.
7. Start a letter-writing club for Angel Tree children and their parents in prison to keep them connected.

## Reports

**Reports are due February 1.**

Each year, we record the names of families who could not be located, or who have refused to participate, and why. Please return your *End of Year* reports and *Children Not Served* forms no later than February 1.

Your *End of Year* report contains information that helps us respond to inquiries from incarcerated parents. Your report is also used to determine application fraud and track restraining order information. The *Children Not Served* forms provide information necessary to update our database for the next year.

**We love to hear about your experiences. Please feel free to include your special Angel Tree story with your report.**

Please fax your report and stories to 877.281.4129, or mail your information to:

Angel Tree  
Attn: End of Year Reports  
44180 Riverside Parkway  
Lansdowne, VA 20176

## Some Tough Questions

*How do I handle a family that wants to add children not related to the incarcerated parent?*

If the children are not the children or step-children of the incarcerated parent, you may still choose to include them, or you may choose to remind the caregiver that the purpose of Angel Tree is a restored relationship between the incarcerated parent and his or her child. Although we would love all children to be served regardless of their relationship to the prisoner, it is not part of the mission and purpose of Angel Tree.

*Because of unknown phone numbers and sometimes even unknown names or addresses, a few Angel Tree children may not be served this year. What do we do?*

Due to the transient lifestyle of many Angel Tree families, not all children will be able to be reached each year. First of all, if they cannot be reached by phone, please try a letter. Make sure to specify that the caregivers must call you or return a letter by a certain date to ensure that the children are served. If they do not contact you by that date, consider them ineligible and/or unwilling to participate in the program. (Note: Be sure to include this in your Children Not Served report at the end of the season.)

*How do we develop and continue relationships with willing families?*

As you know, **the most important thing** you will do this Christmas is deliver the Good News of God's love and salvation. Delivering the Christmas gift is simply a tangible way to demonstrate both the love of God and that of the incarcerated parent.

We encourage you to prayerfully consider expanding your ministry to these children by inviting them to services at your church, sending a birthday card, inviting them to your Vacation Bible School, or even visiting them periodically. The options are limitless. **More than anything, though, these children need to become a part of church fellowship with caring adults and children who will help them grow if they have accepted Christ, or who will continue to water the seed planted at Christmas.**



44180 Riverside Parkway Lansdowne, VA 20176

1.800.55.ANGEL (26435) • [angeltree.org](http://angeltree.org)