



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Christmas Angel Ministry? Since 1994, St. Ignatius has matched individuals and families who have extra need at Christmas with those who would like to help...acting as Christ's hands on earth...from His hands thru ours.

What does an Angel do? Angels provide gifts and/or (non-perishable) food for Christmas dinner to brighten the days of those who struggle.

How do I sign-up to be an Angel? Complete the Sign Up form available at the Church office or on our web page and return to the Church Office.

I need an Angel or know someone who does, how can I get help? Anyone who needs an Angel can call the social ministry office at 281-290-4606 to set up an appointment starting in October. Interviews are by appointment only.

- Parishioners are interviewed by a staff member during the week. If you know someone who might need help, but are uncomfortable asking them, please call Amanda Prewitt at 281-290-4606 and she can help. Their gifts are, if requested, delivered to them on pickup day to ensure their privacy.
- Non-parishioners are interviewed by trained volunteers and staff. They need to live in the immediate area and cannot have signed up for any other Christmas program. They also can only sign up for help for two consecutive years. Please call for a list of the paperwork needed to qualify.

Are there other ways I can be a Christmas Angel? Absolutely! Even those receiving help can be an angel through prayers, kind words to others, and a smile to lighten someone's day! We also need a lot of prayers and helping hands to make this ministry a success. Christmas Angels can also...

- **Volunteer:** Indicate on the Christmas Angel Sign Up Sheet that you would like to volunteer, providing your contact information. We can find the perfect way for you to extend a helping hand this year. We need help with last minute shopping, baking cookies, set up on Friday, December 11th, various activities on Saturday, December 12th, and more.
- **Purchase gift cards:** Purchase and drop off gift cards to the office (in any amount, although \$25 - \$50 is preferred) for local merchants such as: Walmart, Target, HEB, Randalls, Kroger, Old Navy, Kohls, JcPenney, etc.
- **Donate:** Donate to this special ministry by writing checks (any amount) and dropping them in the collection basket (place in sealed envelope marked Christmas Angel Ministry) or at the church office. Please make them out to St. Ignatius Loyola – Christmas Angels Ministry. Be sure to include your parish number on the check so you can be properly credited for the donation.

What steps are taken to protect the privacy of both those who give and those who receive?

Parishioners or known members of the community who receive gifts can opt to have their gifts delivered to them, thereby ensuring their privacy. All information given during the interview process is kept locked in the social ministry office. Only first names and ages are given that could identify someone, and even those are withheld sometimes.

The privacy of those providing gifts is also protected. Angels are addressed on a first-name only basis within the ministry and most communications are through e-mail. When providing gifts/food angels are not to include their names (first or last) and should ensure that there is no identifying details on receipts, cards, or boxes given to the family.

What is expected of those who are helped? We ask those assisted by this program to “*pass it on*” to someone else. Whether a smile, a kind word, a prayer, or a helping hand, we all have something of value to give. The best of God’s gifts are free. Some of our Christmas Angels were assisted by the Christmas Angel Ministry in years past and have returned to help others.

How much money should I spend? This depends upon your budget. Shopping wisely and taking advantage of sales will definitely help. We require only one gift for each child. Adults in the family are optional although many Angels include them. We leave it up to you to determine what you feel is appropriate. We also have the following suggestions:

- ***S-T-R-E-T-C-H your time and money!*** Share your family assignment with family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers.
- ***Create a budget and a list and stick to them.*** Creating a budget and a list BEFORE you go shopping will help you not overspend AND make sure you’re getting what your family needs.

How much time do I need? Assignments have been completed in a couple of hours, or it can require more time depending upon the size & need of your family and how you like to shop. Take into consideration you will need to:

1. ***Complete & return your preference sheet*** which tells us exactly how you would like to help.
2. ***Make your shopping list*** after receiving your family information in mid-November.
3. ***Shop for food and/or gifts*** (based on the family’s needs).
4. ***Wrap, tag and assemble everything.*** All items (boxes, envelopes, etc.) must be clearly marked with your Family Assignment number (given to you with the information in Step #2) and the number of the box out of the total number of boxes – such as Box 1 of 10 – placed in the upper-right corner.
5. ***Deliver gifts to the Christus Center on SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, BETWEEN 8 AM AND NOON.***

How are family assignments provided? Matches are made in late November after we receive your preference information and complete interviews of our families. It is always our hope to have this to you before the Thanksgiving sales. Sometimes we have families who come to us late. We ask your understanding when this occurs.

We will communicate by e-mail, unless it is not available and then we will send information through the mail or contact you by phone. Please check your email, including spam folder, in the latter part of November for your assignment information.

We will provide the following:

- Your Family Assignment #
- First names only, ages, and gender of all members of the household
- Pant and shirt sizes for all children (and adults when possible)
- Favorite color (if you have an option, it’s nice to know which they prefer)
- At least one gift idea for each child – not required to purchase/just an idea of what they like
- Nearest grocery (for purchasing gift cards if desired)
- Any special requests or needs the individual or family might have.

HELP! Where do I start? We suggest you begin by saying a prayer asking God to guide you as you try to work as His hands on earth.

- Review these FAQ's and the Flight Manual.
- Ask yourself, "What would make Christmas special?" while putting yourself in your family's place and thinking about what they need or like.
- Make a list of all the ideas that come to mind, then review and decide on your shopping list.
- If you find yourself stuck on a particular problem, another quick prayer usually brings an answer...often in the most unusual ways. Or contact us, we're always glad to help.

Do I need to buy exactly what is on the "wish list"? The items listed are simply ideas expressed by the parents unless specifically noted. You are not required to purchase any of these items...and certainly not ALL of them. It is merely meant as a shopping guide as to your families likes and interests. If there is a "special request", we will note that.

Gift cards seem impersonal... any suggestions? It is true a gift card can seem impersonal, but it is sometimes the only answer for someone who is hard to fit, etc. We suggest you wrap the gift card in a small gift box (a jewelry box works well) and tie a ribbon around it. They will have something to open and be able to get exactly what they need. There is also less chance it will get lost.

What is meant by food for Christmas dinner? This is the most asked question we get. Angels supply non-perishable items (do not include anything requiring refrigeration) a family would need to prepare a traditional Christmas dinner.

If you like, include a gift card to allow the family to purchase perishable items closer to Christmas. We provide the nearest grocery with your assignment. Some Angels also include holiday tableware (plates, cups, napkins and plastic utensils) or lunch items for children home from school as extras.

Families prepare their own dinner. Angels do not cook.

Several of you have kindly offered frozen turkeys, etc. you receive as promotional items. Unfortunately, we cannot accept them. We do not have refrigerated space to hold them until Christmas, and often families have very small freezers with no extra space as well.

What should I do when there are unusual dietary restrictions and I am to provide Christmas dinner?

Families which include someone with individual diet issues deal daily with this problem. Our suggestion is to provide a gift card for the nearest grocery w/health or organic foods (we will provide specific information). In addition, you may provide a box of food for the rest of the family, so everyone will have a dinner they will enjoy.

What is meant by Significant Need? The families who come to us vary in size and the level of help they need. All are struggling, but some do not even have what we consider basics such as a beds, sheets, blankets, or chairs and table at which to eat. Often they do not have enough so everyone can eat.

When we encounter families in these situations, we ask our Angels who have volunteered to help large families or those who want to do extra to provide what they can. Or, we ask several Angels to divide the needs of the family. They provide additional things like warm clothing, shoes, or blankets for the children along with a toy to brighten their day. Angels sometimes fill in with basic household items or supplies like TP and cleaning/laundry supplies which cannot be purchased with food stamps. Angels may also provide extra food such as staples and things for the children to eat when they cannot get subsidized breakfast or lunch during school breaks.

We also check with other Angels and parishioners to see if we can locate necessary basic furniture such as beds, chairs, and tables. We do whatever we can to take some of the financial stress off these families during the holidays and make life easier.

Can I deliver my gifts early if I will be out of town? This is always a difficult issue for us. Because we lack a secure storage facility at the church, it is difficult to accept your gifts and food before December 12. We offer the following options:

- Perhaps another family member, friend or neighbor could deliver the items for you. We would be happy to call or e-mail them with a reminder if you provide contact info.
- If that is not possible, we may be able to store your items at an Angel volunteer's home who would deliver them for you.

Obviously these are not ideal solutions, but we will do all we can to make arrangements so your special family will not be disappointed. Call or e-mail us if you have a problem. Where there is love, there is always a way.

I would like to bring my children, is that okay? We encourage everyone to bring their children or grandchildren to deliver their gifts and food. Christmas Angels is a wonderful teaching tool for children. It also brings families closer as they work together to bring joy to others.

We ask that no one is there in the afternoon when families come to pick up their gifts. Although we understand everyone likes to see the happiness of those they've worked so hard to help, it is important to allow them their privacy. Please give these families the opportunity to spend a few quiet moments alone with God to appreciate what He has done for them. And remember, ***Christmas Angels appear suddenly and disappear without a trace!*** Please explain to the children that angels remain hidden...***it is their secret and God's...***families only feel the brush of their wings.

Can we bring Christmas trees or wreaths still in good shape? Because our families are often in apartments, space is at a premium including space to store it. Also, transportation of trees is difficult because they are also transporting gifts and food...often in small cars.

Table top or small trees or small wreaths are welcome. We ask you to please let us know beforehand if you would like to bring trees other than a tabletop to see if there is space to handle them. Even our space is very limited.

We stress they should be new or in ***VERY GOOD*** condition. Trees other than table top should be boxed or bagged to be easily transportable.

What else do I need to know?

ALWAYS get a gift check to make returns easier. Your gift may be perfect, but may not fit, etc. Returns are easiest with a gift check or a store receipt. If you can't get a gift check, pay in cash if you can. This will protect your personal information (no credit card info or names) and will make exchanges hassle-free.

We want to stress a gift check is ALWAYS the best choice if you plan to include it as a charitable deduction on your taxes. The IRS will require the receipt as proof of purchase. A gift check provides everyone the necessary documentation.

Remember to save receipts and other documentation for tax purposes! Your gifts are tax-deductible (see your tax advisor for specifics pertaining to your situation), but you need to ensure you have the right documentation to support it.

If you have other questions, e-mail us at christmasangels@sbcglobal.net or call the Angel line at 832-217-7335.