

CHRISTMAS FAMILIES 2021

For a long time a strong and faithful commitment of bringing the good news of Christmas in a very tangible form that manifests God's inclusive love for all and raises hope has been woven into the fabric of Immanuel. In expectation that this commitment will show itself in a strong **special collection next Sunday, December 19th**, the Christmas Families ministry has undertaken or will soon undertake the following at the times when it does most good.

\$5,000 to Alexandria Human Services to be used for gift cards for holiday gifts and other urgent support for families. Since Human Services does not distribute physical toys this year, this check takes the place of parishioners signing up to provide toys for a family in need.

\$1,200 to Offender Aid and Restoration (OAR, <https://www.oaronline.org/>), in support of their Project Winter Cheer for gift cards to children of incarcerated people, a joint effort of Christmas Families and our expanded social justice and criminal justice ministry.

In our long-standing collaboration with the refugee **ministry coordinated by Christ Church** (Melanie Gray), we provided 218 fleece blankets for children to cuddle with (from Kohl's with a 65% Black Friday discount). (Christ Church raised over \$30,000 to provide substantial gift cards to Target and Giant for each family). In addition, Christ Church had last-minute referrals, eight families with 16 children, for whom we will assemble physical gifts from our inventory. Linda Serabian is our point person for all this. Thank you, Linda!

We have an even longer-standing collaboration with **CFNC (Child and Family Network Centers)**. From inventory, we are giving each of the 139 children in their preschools one copy each of

- 📖 Anno's Counting Book
- 📖 500 Words (small format pbk, for each word a picture and text in English and Spanish) (Connie Kurz is taking care of this. *Thank you, Connie!*)

A primer on Christmas Family Finances. Immanuel has a Christmas Families Fund, which dates back to 2005, when a fire at the Soergels' house (then the Christmas Families Headquarters) destroyed or damaged a lot of toys. A report on that small disaster on News 4 resulted in many contributions to Immanuel, way more than was needed to replace the toys. Since then, each year the fund was used to buy toys on sale and have them ready for wrapping. Last year and this year we needed to get gift cards to Human Services early. We spend an amount in line with what historically could be expected from the special collection. The special collection then pays the fund back to be ready for next year. Anything left over after that will go to fill last-minute needs the same year.

The Christmas Families team makes each dollar go far. Linda got the fleece blankets for just under \$10, regular \$26.99. As part of a Kohl's promotion, these purchases earned \$500 in Kohl's cash, which Linda used before it expired to buy baby and other toys on sale to replenish our inventory. In every normal year, Connie Kurz and Laura Snow make a trip to the Green Valley Bookfair to buy good books at a steep discount. Anno's Counting Book and 500 Words are staples in our ministry of adding books to the toys. Every three years or so we buy 500 copies of each, the minimum to get a 50% discount from the publisher.

Please be generous on December 19th!

