

Angel Tree® Coordinator's Guide

Share the Joy of Christ with Children and Invest in Their Future

For the children of prisoners, life can be sad, lonely and depressing. The feeling of rejection is powerful, often resulting in demotivation and hopelessness. It is even harder during holidays, such as Christmas and other meaningful events that honor family traditions.

Millions of children worldwide have lost one or both parents to incarceration and live in poverty, isolation and hard-to-reach communities. These children are among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups which puts them at high risk for exploitation, abuse and neglect unless we intervene and work together to show them a hopeful future.

Angel Tree® is a powerful program that reaches prisoners' children with the love of Christ during this painful period of separation. Angel Tree® provides a valuable opportunity to connect with those children and their families, not only at Christmas but through a variety of year-round ministry opportunities.

As a result of Angel Tree®, children experience joy, not just from the gifts received, but from knowing their incarcerated mother or father hasn't forgotten them.





Get Involved

Because of their parents' crimes, children of prisoners are often overlooked, forgotten, rejected and scorned by their local community and society. Children should not be punished for their parents' mistakes. Angel Tree® provides the opportunity to demonstrate Christ's love and compassion to children and families in need, as it helps restore damaged child-parent relationships through the separation caused by imprisonment.

Run This Program

Angel Tree® helps bridge the gap between incarcerated parents and their children by helping to strengthen the parent-child relationship. Operated in a consistent, child-focused manner, Angel Tree® is an effective crime prevention measure with far reaching benefits for the community, local church, family unit and the National Ministry.



Benefits of Angel Tree

Fostering and healing the relationships between an inmate and their child is the primary purpose of Angel Tree®, yet there are many benefits:

Introduces Churches to Prison Ministry

While many church members may be unfamiliar or intimidated by prison ministry, most are eager and willing to help children in need. The Angel Tree® program is often welcomed by local churches, serving as a steppingstone to engage the church and its members with other programs run by the National Ministry.

Introduces PFI and our National Ministry Partners to Prisoners

Prisoners are eager to participate in Angel Tree®, even those who refuse to take part in other PFI or local programs. National Ministries can use Angel Tree® to develop an ongoing relationship with a prisoner, in addition to their children and family.

Increases the Visibility of PFI and the National Ministry in the Community

Angel Tree® also provides an opportunity for National Ministries to work with others in their community, including churches, businesses, government officials and agencies, other NGOs and the media. Angel Tree® opens doors for cooperative efforts that can be expanded to other Prison Fellowship International and National Ministry programs, furthering all prison ministry activities. Additional visibility through these efforts often leads to the recruitment of new volunteers and donors.

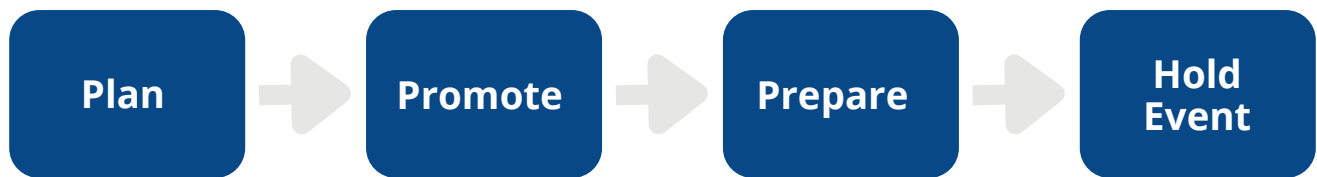
Demonstrates the Love and Compassion of Jesus Christ

Many prisoners and their families are unaccustomed to the kindness of strangers. Once someone is imprisoned, the entire family is commonly cast aside by their community, both socially and economically. The small gesture of kindness shown by the volunteers who assist with Angel Tree® clearly illustrates the love of Christ. Prisoners often join a Bible study or participate in a PFI program in response to the love and care shown to them and their families through Angel Tree®.

Implementing Angel Tree® at Christmas

Angel Tree® is a partnership between the Prison Fellowship International, the National Ministry, prison chaplains, local churches and the community.

The following steps may be adapted according to the culture of each National Ministry. Begin by identifying when your Angel Tree® event will happen, then plan backward 2 to 3 months to ensure sufficient time.



Engaging Prisoners

To qualify for an Angel Tree® gift, the child should be of an incarcerated person or a child who was financially supported by an incarcerated person.

Once Angel Tree® has been promoted in a prison, a prisoner should complete an application form for their child. The application is returned to the chaplain, prison authorities or directly to National Ministry volunteers or staff for follow-up by the National Ministry.

Engaging Churches

Once applications are received from inmates, National Ministries can either assign children to participating churches or individuals, or they can add the children and family names to the list of people they plan to invite to their Angel Tree® event. Once children have been assigned to local churches or volunteers and/or the National Ministry has compiled its list of children and families being invited to their Angel Tree® event, the National Ministry staff member or a volunteer from the local church or community calls or writes to the child's caregiver to tell them about Angel Tree®. If an Angel Tree® event is being planned, they will invite the children and the caregiver to attend. If they are distributing individual gifts and not holding an event, the details of gift delivery for the child should be discussed.

In some locations, volunteers purchase specific gifts for the children. In other locations, the gifts the children receive are generic, age-appropriate and all similar. If children are given unique gifts, the National Ministry will typically provide volunteers with a gift tag containing information about the specific gift needed for the child. If the National Ministry is providing generic, age-appropriate gifts for the children at their Angel Tree® event, they should provide a list of the gifts they are looking for so that volunteers know what to donate and how many of each gift is needed.

Delivering the Presents

Presents can be delivered to children in the following ways:

- Delivered by church members who live near the prisoner's family or mailed directly to the child.
- Delivered at an Angel Tree® event which brings together church members, National Ministry staff, volunteers and the children and families. The event may take place inside a prison with the children's incarcerated parents present (if allowed by the prison authorities), or at a church, park or other venue selected by the National Ministry with children and their caregivers present.



For many children and families who are participating in an Angel Tree® event, it may be the first time they have been introduced to the National Ministry and their activities, so it is important to capitalize on this opportunity.

The Angel Tree® event also provides children and their families with an opportunity to get connected with local churches as they meet and become acquainted with volunteers from the local churches, which provides another source of support for them.

Recruiting Churches and Other Organizations

Make a list of churches, collaborators, partners and donors in your community. Send a letter explaining the concept of Angel Tree® and request their assistance. National Ministries who are participating should appoint a coordinator to oversee the collection and distribution of gifts and serve as a liaison with the National Ministry, donors, volunteers and local supermarkets.

Consider sending letters to local businesses and retailers requesting their participation in Angel Tree® through gift donations, or local supermarkets and restaurants who may also want to donate prepared food and other perishable goods for your Angel Tree® event.

Coordinating an Angel Tree® Program

Angel Tree® coordinators should supervise the planning, promotion, needs identification, church and volunteer engagement, gift collection, gift distribution and follow-up. Promotional materials, including posters, gift tags and ads for social media sites on www.pfi.org/angeltree can be used for promoting, planning and conducting Angel Tree® events.

Resources

- Angel Tree® Poster: Posters for the promotion of Angel Tree® are available and can be printed by going to www.pfi.org/angeltree. National Ministries may choose any poster found on the site to promote their Angel Tree® event. Do not forget to provide all the information regarding your local event in the blank space at the bottom of the poster.
- Tags: Gift tags that match each Angel Tree® poster can be found on the Angel Tree® resource site ministries can use these tags in whatever ways they see fit for their Angel Tree® event.
- Ads for Social Media: Ads for use on various social media platforms for the promotion of Angel Tree® can be found at www.pfi.org/angeltree. National Ministries can use these ads in whatever ways they see fit to promote their Angel Tree® event.

Ideas for a Church Christmas Angel Tree® Event

Angel Tree® events are a great way to share the Gospel with children of prisoners and their families while giving them with an opportunity to connect with a local church.



Take a photo of each family at the event and have volunteers from their local church deliver or mail prints to them, or make them available at the church. This provides yet another opportunity for them to connect with the local church.



Sing Christmas carols and provide song sheets.



Prepare a Christmas program (e.g., skit, musical) explaining the Christmas story.



Encourage local churches to provide food donations and serve them.



Distribute gift bags to the children, including small treats and Christian literature.



Pass out Bibles and remind the children Jesus loves them.

Angel Tree® Year-Round

Many National Ministries share the love of Christ with children throughout the year, helping them grow in their Christian faith and strengthen relationships with their imprisoned parents.

Here are some other events that National Ministries run in addition to their Angel Tree® event:



Back-to-School Event

Provide backpacks and school supplies to school-aged children with incarcerated parents.



Children's Day

Celebrate children with incarcerated parents by hosting an fun event like concerts, plays or prison visits



Mother's Day

Take time for children to celebrate and appreciate their mothers and/or female caregivers.



Easter Celebration

Celebrate the resurrection of the Lord and have a special event for children of prisoners.



Family Fun Day

Lunch and activities inside the prison for incarcerated parents and their children to spend the day together.



Mentoring

Connect a Christian mentor with children for support in one or more areas for at least one year.

If you are interested in expanding your Angel Tree® experience, contact your regional office to find out more about how you can partner with Prison Fellowship International to run PromisePath, PFI's modular children's program.

Get to Planning!

August

Appoint an Angel Tree® Prison Fellowship coordinator and volunteer committee to oversee the program. Brainstorm with the team to determine how you will run your Angel Tree® event(s).

September

Provide application forms to prison chaplains for distribution to prisoners.

Early October

Recruit volunteers in as many churches as possible to assist with your Angel Tree® event.

Mid-October

Collect all application forms from the prisons and begin compiling a list of participating children.

Early November

Ask church volunteers and coordinators to contact child guardians to explain the Angel Tree® program and invite them to your event. If you are giving specific gifts to each child, ideas may be supplied by the incarcerated parent and volunteers can be given a list of the gifts needed for the children. If giving generic, age-appropriate gifts to children, provide volunteers with a list of gifts needed and how many you will need.

Contact the news media and the news media to promote your event. Post information about your Angel Tree event on social media outlets.

Mid-November

Local volunteers should gather gifts and national ministries should make final preparations for the Angel Tree® event.

Early December

All gifts should be collected and delivered to the location determined by the national ministry. If the gifts are being delivered directly to the children, ensure that all gifts are tagged and sorted properly.

Mid-December

Churches should either hold an Angel Tree® event or make gift deliveries. This provides time to make deliveries to those unable to attend the event. It is also a good time to re-alert the media that your event is taking place.

Early January

All churches and volunteers should receive thank you notes and invitations to participate in upcoming national ministry events, including the next Angel Tree® activity. Follow-up should continue year-round. Meet with your team to evaluate your Angel Tree® event and get feedback to improve for the next year.

And finally, our donors and the staff at PFI love to hear about your Angel Tree events, and how God is using you and your volunteers to serve children of prisoners. Following your Angel Tree event, please the program office photos and testimonies about your events.

