November & December Opportunities

Food and Basic Needs

- **Thanksgiving Baskets or Meal Boxes:** Have families "adopt" a box and fill it from a shared shopping list. You could also partner with a local food bank.
- **Community Thanksgiving or Christmas Meal:** Provide a free, sit-down meal open to anyone, especially people who would otherwise eat alone.
- **Reverse Advent Calendar:** Each day of Advent, encourage families to add one item (food, toiletries, socks) to a box and bring it in before Christmas.
- **Blessing Bags:** Assemble bags of hygiene items, snacks, gloves, and hand warmers for people experiencing homelessness.
- **Feeding the Multitudes:** Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed thousands. Your church can share that same kind of generosity with your neighbors. Collect food donations from your congregation and local businesses, then pack meal bags for families in need. Invite the community to your church for a message of hope and send every family in need home with a meal bag.

Children & Local Community

- **Angel Tree:** Gather Christmas wishes from local families with children, foster kids/youth, or nursing home residents and write each one on a paper angel or tag. Hang the tags on a tree in your Fellowship Hall. Church members can choose a tag, buy the gift, and bring it back. Your Angel Tree team delivers the gifts, or offers a gift pickup day, in time for Christmas.
- **Christmas Store:** Collect gifts and donations from your church family and create a store where parents in need can "shop" new toys for free (or at a deep discount).

This gives parents and guardians the opportunity to shop and choose gifts for their own children.

- **Coat, Hat, and Mitten Drive:** Help keep students warm this winter. Partner with local schools to learn which students need coats, hats, and mittens, then collect new items and financial gifts from your congregation. Hand everything off to school counselors or staff to give out to the students who need them most.
    - Alternatively, you could do this with food/snack bags for kids who are hungry.
- **Operation Christmas Child:** Partner with Samaritan's Purse to send gift-filled shoeboxes to children around the world. Your church can gather supplies in the fall, or spread the giving out over the year by collecting one item each month: toothbrushes in January, school supplies in February, etc. In November, host a packing party to assemble the boxes as a church family, then drop off your boxes during National Collection Week.
- **Embrace Christmas:** Consider partnering with and collecting donations for a program like Embrace Alabama Kids or Embrace Florida Kids to support vulnerable children, families, and those in need.

Connection and Community

- **Open Table:** Invite someone who is alone for Thanksgiving or Christmas to your holiday table.
- **Empty Chair:** Holidays are a difficult time for those who have lost a loved one. Host an event for these individuals and families that includes worship, fellowship, a message of hope for the season, and small group discussions. Provide a meal at the end of the program for people to connect and share.
- **Caroling Visits:** Have small groups gather to sing at nursing homes, hospitals, or the homes of shut-in and homebound members.
- **Blue Christmas/Longest Night Service:** Host a quiet worship service around December 21st for people grieving or finding the season hard.
- **Card Ministry:** Write Christmas cards to shut-ins/homebound members, military members, prisoners, or first responders.

- **Christmas Carols:** Get groups together to visit local nursing homes, hospitals, and homebound members, sharing the hope of Christmas through song. Groups can also bring candy canes, poinsettias, or handmade cards to brighten someone's day.
- **Tree of Remembrance:** Offer an opportunity to celebrate the people who have shaped lives, ministry, and the church through a gift of honor or remembrance. Place each name on the Tree of Remembrance and list them in the Christmas Eve bulletin. This is a meaningful way to let their light shine in this season.

Serve

- **Day of Service:** Spend one Saturday serving your community side by side as a church family. Offer projects for every age and ability, like raking leaves for elderly neighbors, serving a meal at a local shelter, or packing food boxes. End the day back at the church with lunch and stories of how God showed up.
- **First Responder and Teacher Appreciation:** Deliver treats and thank-you notes to fire stations, police, hospitals, and schools before the Thanksgiving and Christmas break.
- **Utility or Rent Assistance Fund:** Set aside a Sunday to collect donations that will help local families with winter heating bills or emergency expenses.

Church Family Fellowship

- **Thanksgiving Gratitude Wall**: Through November, give your church family a chance to write what they're thankful for on paper leaves or cards and add them to a wall or tree in the Fellowship Hall. By Thanksgiving Day, it will show God's faithfulness across the whole congregation.
- **Gingerbread Competition:** Gather families for an afternoon of holiday creativity! Provide gingerbread kits, icing, and plenty of candy so each family or team can build their own house. Invite a few judges to award 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place ribbons or prizes. Consider adding fun categories like "Most Creative" and "Best Teamwork." Hot cocoa and snacks are a good addition to the event.
- **Volunteer Celebration:** Host a dinner to honor everyone who serves in your church: teachers, greeters, musicians, kitchen crews, and more. Celebrate them with

testimonies, awards, small gifts, or a slideshow of the year's ministry moments. A heartfelt thank-you goes a long way!

- **Hanging of the Greens**: Kick off Advent by decorating the sanctuary together. Families hang wreaths, garland, and ornaments while you share readings and carols that explain the meaning behind each symbol. It's a lovely way to begin the season as a church family.
- **Advent Wreath Workshop**: Host an event at the church where families and individuals can make their own Advent wreaths. Lead a devotion while they work, and play Christmas music.
    - Alternatively, allow families to take home supplies to make their own Advent wreaths. Include a simple devotional guide with a reading and prayer for each week, so families can light candles and worship together at home.
- **Live Nativity**: Bring the Christmas story to life with church family members of all ages in costume (if you can, add in a few animals too). Invite the community to drive or walk through, and offer hot cocoa and a warm welcome.
- **Cookie Swap and Packing Party**: Have everyone bring a few dozen cookies to trade. Provide containers so everyone can take home their goodies. Set aside a portion of the cookies for shut-ins, first responders, or church neighbors.
    - Alternatively, this could be turned into a fundraiser where individuals pay per box or for the weight of their cookie box
- **Christmas Movie Night**: Show a family-friendly Christmas movie in the fellowship hall with popcorn, blankets, and pajamas welcome. Encourage your congregation to invite friends and neighbors.
- **Ugly Sweater Potluck**: Host a potluck lunch/dinner with a sweater contest and prizes.
- **Christmas Pageant or Children's Program**: Have your Children's Ministry kids tell the Christmas story through songs, readings, and costumes. This pairs well with a fellowship meal or reception afterward.
- **New Year's Prayer and Hope Gathering**: Close the year with a simple evening of worship, testimonies from the past year, and prayer for the year ahead. Families could write prayers for the new year to keep or share.