

Christian musicians, VeggieTales crew aid Operation Christmas Child

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Christian recording artists teamed up with talking vegetables to collect 8 million gift-filled shoeboxes for children in more than 100 countries.

Since its inception in 1993, [Operation Christmas Child](#), a project of Samaritan's Purse, has sought to spread the love of Christ to impoverished children around the world through a shoebox full of small gifts at Christmas.



Singer/songwriter Matthew West traveled to Bogota, Colombia, with Operation Christmas Child

This year, several contemporary Christian musicians and the team from [VeggieTales/Big Idea Productions](#) promoted Operation Christmas Child in multiple venues.

Brandon Heath, Dove Award-winning male vocalist of the year used his

website and public appearances to promote the efforts. And on a personal level, for every pair of shoes he purchased throughout the year, Heath committed to fill a shoebox for Operation Christmas Child.

“I ended up buying six pairs of shoes this year, and I saved and filled all the boxes for this project,” Heath said. “Not only does this project provide gifts for people who normally wouldn’t receive gifts this time of the year, but it is a tremendous opportunity to reach a lot of people and share the gospel, which is the ultimate goal of Samaritan’s Purse and Operation Christmas Child. It’s a very active way of showing people who Jesus is— through loving the poor and having a heart for children.

“I love that it gives people an opportunity to share gifts outside of your own family. Selecting the items to put in the shoeboxes and putting the packages together gives families a wonderful opportunity to work together as they are taking the time to bless others. It can become a fun project and a tradition to teach children about the importance of giving and sharing Christ’s love with others around the world.”

Singer/songwriter Matthew West also shared about Operation Christmas Child while touring across the country. The VeggieTales movie, *Saint Nicholas: A Story of Joyful Giving*, was shown before each concert on his “Give This Christmas Away” tour.

In a collaborative effort between VeggieTales and Operation Christmas Child, more than 65,000 churches across the country held shoebox collection activities along with DVD screenings of the movie.

“It’s a fantastic partnership that aligns perfectly with the message of the film,” said Mike Nawrocki, co-creator of VeggieTales—better known as the voice of Larry the Cucumber.



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“Christmas has become so commercialized, and we really want for children to keep the focus on Christ. Operation Christmas Child is based on helping others and giving to the needy while sharing the gospel,” he said.

“Through this film, we wanted to share a story about giving joyfully and sharing with a community. It’s a story within a story, where the characters learn that God first gave and God first loved—so we can give and share love with others.”

West’s song, “Give This Christmas Away” was used in the movie’s credits and also selected as the theme song for this year’s Operation Christmas Child promotions.

“What it means to me to ‘give this Christmas away’ is to be mindful of the world around us that is in need—being aware of the people you may ordinarily overlook and the causes that have greater needs each year,” West said.

“It’s about stopping and pausing long enough to look at the world from the perspective of: ‘How can I help? How can I give? How can God use me to help meet the needs of somebody else this Christmas, instead of me just checking off the list of everything I want?’

“In a lot of ways, the song and the film really go against the flow of what everyone’s trying to sell this Christmas: ‘Have it your way. Get what you want. Happiness will be found in material possessions. You’ll feel fulfilled if you get a certain gift.’ Children can easily adopt this mentality at a young age because of consumer-driven influences.

“I think parents can use the film and the song as an opportunity to teach their children about the value of giving to organizations such as Operation Christmas Child. The main message is that true fulfillment and true joy is found when we give to others—when we look beyond our own needs and help meet the needs of others.”

West has traveled to Bogota, Colombia with Operation Christmas Child, and Nawrocki went to Panama. They witnessed firsthand how these simple efforts of giving are making a huge impact in the hearts and lives of children around the world.

“It was a life-changing experience,” West said. “Franklin Graham, who is the head of Samaritan’s Purse and Operation Christmas Child, was there as well. We distributed over 1,000 shoeboxes that were filled with toys, school supplies and personal hygiene items. When we handed the shoeboxes to the children, the looks on their faces were just priceless. They were overwhelmed with joy. For many of these children, they had never dreamed of receiving any gifts at Christmas.”

Nawrocki added: “It was an amazing experience to see the children opening up their shoeboxes, to see the joy in their faces and then for them to hear the gospel. My children packed two shoeboxes for children their

age, so it was a personal connection. It's a great way for children to reach beyond themselves and see the impact it makes."