

Our Christmas Assistance Program was an established program in the parish at least as far back as 1989.

The families register separately for Christmas. In the past our volunteers would pack up each family from the gifts donated. Each child received something warm to wear and a toy. The families also get a food box, fixing for a holiday meal including fresh fruit and vegetables along with a meat (Turkey, Ham or Roasting Chicken depending on family size). Also, we then delivered Christmas to the families.

In 2017, our program changed. We became a family choice Christmas Program. Our families now come in and register and are given a date and time to come back to shop.

We ask for unwrapped gifts and we set them on tables according to size for clothes or age for toys. We separate gender by different areas of our church basement.

The parent comes in and picks their children gifts. Each child will receive something warm to wear and a toy as the basic.

We also have it so now other donations we have asked for are on display for choosing. For example: We began asking for fleece blankets/throws about 5 years ago when a parent had for years asked if we had any blankets? Her family only had a couple blankets in the house. They used them on their bed and to wrap up in them to stay warm while they played or watched TV. After the first year we had the blankets to pack at Christmas, one of families came in for food in January and the teenager boy of the family came up to us and thanked us for his blanket. He now has a blanket of his very own for the first time in his life. We also have winter coats, hats, gloves, socks, undershirts, underwear, books, and stuffed animals on tables. Those tables we just tell the parents to pick from as they shop if their children need anything.

The families are greeted by volunteers and a volunteer is assigned to each family to shop with them. They are given the option to wrap their gifts here or to take them home unwrapped. After shopping, they then go upstairs to the church where they are greeted another set of volunteers who will give them their food that is packed, fruit and vegetables, and meat for a Christmas dinner, and they are then helped to their cars.

We have much more one on one interaction with our families this way. We weren't sure how changing the program would work, our main concern was would the families be able to get here. If transportation is a problem, we go and pick them and take them home. If for some reason they can't come in and shop, we will pack for the family and deliver. But in 2017, even with 8 inches of snow dumped on us, school closings, and bitter cold temperatures, we had only three families that we had to pack for and deliver. In 2018, we had 99 families signed up, for 445 people, 300 of them were children, 18 and under. We don't have an age cut off. If they are living at home and still in school-we will get them a gift. We had about 20 young adults this year.