**Concerns about Samaritan’s Purse and other shoebox schemes**

Filling a shoebox is a popular way of getting children and others to think about people less well off than we are in the UK and to encourage people to make donations of small items. Shoebox schemes are often promoted at Christmas time and a very popular one is Operation Christmas Child (OCC) operated by Samaritan’s Purse (SP; SPUK). [www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/](http://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/).

Every year, however, there are some who raise concerns about shoebox schemes and whether they are aiding unhelpful or inappropriate forms of evangelism, or are actively interfering in other cultures. Others have raised questions about the kinds of items which can be sent and whether some items may have little relevance or use to people living in poverty or whose cultural contexts are significantly different from ours. Such concerns point to a central issue about being properly informed about the charities supported and about the recipients of charitable donations.

To be fair to Samaritan’s Purse, for example, they are transparent about the desire to evangelise at every opportunity. The statement of faith is on their website <https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/who-we-are/mission-and-faith-statement/> and they also make it clear that staff and volunteers are obliged to see what they do as an opportunity for evangelism. This has led to allegations of religious and cultural insensitivity and the charity is aware of the criticisms. It is worth checking any charity’s website for the most current information about its work, as ideas, outlook and practices do change. The Trustees Report and Financial Statements for SPUK 2016 can be found here: <https://spuk.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/25151841/Trustees%27%20Report%202016.pdf>

It should also be pointed out that some of the detractors of such schemes are humanist groups which have their own agenda with respect to this kind of aid.

More recently, however, concerns have been raised about the President of Samaritan’s Purse, the Rev’d W. Franklin Graham (son of the evangelist Billy Graham) and his personal statements about Christian faith in relation to his personal support for President Donald Trump. This has caused some questions to be concerned about whether support for OCC implies support for Mr Graham’s personal views or support for OCC implies promoting those views among other, possibly vulnerable, people.

The C of E does not have an 'official' position on Samaritans Purse and Operation Christmas Child or other shoebox schemes, but we do urge everyone to look into the charities they choose to support and to be sure that they are happy about what the charities do with donations and how they behave towards those whom they help. We suggest that people might like to think about:

* Does the way the charity works fit with your own feelings about development, relief, aid and/or evangelism and faith-sharing?
* Are there any things about the charity's current provenance, statement of faith or intentions which give you cause for concern?
* How do you think vulnerable people should be helped by Christian charities?

With specific reference to Samaritan’s Purse (SP), Operation Christmas Child (OCC) and The Greatest Journey (TLG):

* Do you think SP, OCC and/or TLG are shaped, moulded or otherwise affected by the personal views and controversies surrounding Franklin Graham?

It’s up to individuals to decide whom they want to support, but they should make sure they are happy with what they are enabling by giving. There are alternatives to the popular shoebox schemes available. For example, Save the Children and Oxfam also have easy to use gift-giving schemes suitable for children.

In addition, most shoebox schemes offer suggestions about what and what not to include in a shoebox. However, if it is known that people of a particular age group, cultural context and/or geographical area are the intended recipients, it is worth learning something about how those people live and what their specific needs are in their context. Household items and toys which we take for granted in our own homes, may not be helpful for people whose needs are much more basic. Christian agencies working on the ground in those areas might be able to help with that.

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