

Frequently Asked Questions - The Giving Tree, 2009

Q: What information is on the ornament label and how do I use it?

A: Each label reads "*Merry Christmas from the Newman Catholic Center, Amherst, MA*", followed by an identifier code (for internal use). On the last few lines of the label is the child's first name, age, gender, clothing size, and any clothing suggestions. For example, a label might read: "*Angie, 5 yrs, female*" on one line, then "*child size 6X, shirt and slacks*" on the next. In this example, you'd be shopping for a five-year old girl named Angie who wants a shirt and pair of slacks, child's size 6X.

Gender is indicated by either the word "*Female*" or "*Male*". Age will be listed as either "*Yrs*" (years) or "*Months*". The label may list "*XS*", "*S*", "*M*", "*L*", "*XL*", or "*2XL*" which correspond to sizes "*Extra Small*", "*Small*", "*Medium*", "*Large*", "*Extra Large*", and "*Double Extra Large*." Please pay particular attention to gender, size, and type of size (e.g., child size versus adult). Please also note that many children wear adult size clothing: clothing sizes don't necessarily correspond neatly to a child's age (most sizes are larger).

Q: Is the Giving Tree program open to those not connected with the Newman Catholic Center? My family / department / office / club / team / residence hall or organization would like to help.

A: Yes, the Newman Giving Tree program is open to anyone in the community who wishes to participate. We place notices with local media to encourage participation. Year after year, many groups not affiliated with the Newman Center open their hearts and assist. We could not accommodate all of the 600 children on our lists without their help. Feel free to spread the word!

Q: When is my gift due back at the Newman Center?

A: The deadline for the return of gifts (in gift bags) is Sunday, December 13th at noon.

Q: Can I bring my gift bag to the Newman Center before December 13th?

A: Yes – and we encourage you to do so! Place your gift bag, with the ornament's label side up, under the Giving Tree in the Chapel. Do not be alarmed if your gift is not there the next time you come: we may have moved it for storing purposes.

Q: Why are gifts of clothing specified for the Giving Tree program? Children like toys, too.

A: The Newman Center chose a clothing-specific drive as a commitment to help families in Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden counties fulfill a very basic need: adequate clothing. Feel free to add a book or small toy, if desired. Also, please note that other groups in the area often provide toys to these agencies for these children.

Q: Why do you want gifts returned in gift bags (instead of having gifts individually wrapped)?

A: The agencies that provide the names of children in need requested gift bags so that they may ensure that each gift is appropriate for each child and family. In the past, agencies have had to unwrap all the gifts that the Newman Center provided before distributing them, and we don't want the agencies to have to go through that extra step. Please note that often there are siblings on our lists and it's important for gifts to be comparable within a family. Also, for those buying gifts, placing a gift in a gift bag is easier and takes less time than wrapping it.

Q: How can I help my own children get the most out of the Giving Tree program?

A: The Giving Tree program is a wonderful opportunity for children to learn about the true meaning of the holidays and generosity. Many children select an ornament of a child who is just like them – same age and gender. We attempt to place ornaments representing younger children near the bottom of the Giving Tree so that your youngster may more easily find his/her "match." Consider shopping for clothing gifts with your own child so that he or she is fully involved in the process. Children also love to place the gift bags under the Giving Tree.

Q: Is a gift card / gift certificate okay?

A: Yes! Clothing store gift cards, or gift cards for department stores that have a good selection of children's clothing, are a great idea. You may feel more comfortable purchasing a gift card for older children / teenagers, or if the ornament's label doesn't provide enough information. Place the gift card in a gift bag, wrapped in tissue paper, as usual. You may wish to include a small gift (such as a book, toy, or small item of clothing) with it.



2009 Giving Tree Frequently Asked Questions, continued

Q: Why is a \$20-\$25 range suggested? I / we can do more and would like to make children's Christmases very special by buying them a lot of clothes / more expensive clothes.

A: We love your spirit of generosity! The Newman Center has committed to buying clothing for approximately 600 children. To ensure that every child receives a gift, please consider taking another ornament to make a difference in that child's life, as well. A primary reason for the suggested dollar amount is that our lists contain many siblings. These children will see what their brothers and sisters receive, so we strive for gift choices that meet basic clothing needs and are as consistent as possible to avoid issues within families.

Q: My ornament's label doesn't give me enough specifics about what to buy / my ornament only lists one small item / there are no sizes listed / items listed are beyond my price range. What should I do?

A: You have flexibility in what you purchase. Agencies are asked to provide suggestions about clothing needs and sizes but this does not always happen. Sometimes there are no gift suggestions, too many, a small item listed (such as a pair of socks), or clothing requests that exceed the \$20-\$25 suggested price range (like a coat). In all cases, use your best judgment about an age-appropriate clothing gift. You do not need to follow the suggestion on the label, particularly if doing so will involve exceeding your personal means or the \$20-25 range. To give you some ideas on appropriate clothing purchases, a **child's outfit** (such as a top and pants), sweaters, pajamas, or an outdoor clothing item are always welcome. Another option is to purchase a gift card.

Q: Times are tough, especially this year. I want to participate in the Giving Tree but my situation is: 1) I don't have time to / the desire to shop OR 2) I don't have enough money to spare. Any suggestions?

A: For Situation #1: If you don't have time to shop or would prefer not to, there are those who would love to shop but who don't have the financial means to do so. We will arrange for this to happen. We'll accept your cash or gift card, and our volunteers will do the shopping for you! For Situation #2: If finances are a challenge, and we certainly understand if they are, there are creative ways to participate. For example, consider soliciting cash donations from your residence hall, office, or organization (*if such solicitation is allowed – check first!*). Then select someone to purchase a gift. Another less expensive option is the Giving Tree's **Hat, Scarf, and Mitten drive**. Some agencies request just hats and mittens. Hats, scarves, mittens, and gloves may be purchased or knitted by hand. We will match up hats with mittens, if you purchase just the hat or mittens.

If these suggestions don't work for you, consider helping at our gift sorting event. Just show up: we'll put you to work for about an hour, helping us bundle up gifts for pick-up. Sorting takes place Sunday, December 13th, after the 7:00 pm Mass. In each way, all can participate in the Giving Tree at a comfortable and meaningful level.

Q: Why are there some gold stars on the Giving Tree?

A: By replacing ornaments with gold stars, we help transform the Giving Tree from a tree filled with paper ornaments (representing children in need) to one filled with symbols of caring and unity from the community (representing needs met). Both versions of the tree are beautiful in their own right. As we watch the Giving Tree become more golden in color, we know that more children will be receiving gifts. The fully golden tree, with gift bags underneath, will stand as a tangible representation of the Newman community's generosity.

Q: What if I take an ornament and then find I can't afford to purchase the clothing -- what should I do?

A: When you take an ornament, please consider it a commitment from you to that child. However, we understand that situations arise that may make it difficult or impossible for you to make your purchase. If, for some reason you are unable to fulfill that commitment, please place the ornament back on the Giving Tree or drop it off at the Newman Center – no questions asked – as soon as possible so that someone else can step in.

Q: What should I do if I lose my ornament?

A: The ornament's label contains an important identifier, so we ask that you try to keep an eye on it throughout the process. If you should misplace your ornament, please write us a note and attach it to your gift bag when you bring it to the Newman Center. In your note, write whatever you remember about the child (e.g., name, gender, age, clothing needs, or part of the identifier code), along with what you purchased and the size. With this information we can do some "detective work" and get the gift to the right child.

**DEADLINE FOR RETURNING FILLED GIFT BAGS TO THE
NEWMAN CENTER: SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2009 (by 7:00 PM)**
The Newman Catholic Center 472 N. Pleasant St. Amherst, MA 01002 413-549-0300