

## **A Christmas Without Sacrifice: How Christmas Village Helps Families Protect What Matters Most**



Every parent knows the feeling: that deep, steady ache to give your child a Christmas morning filled with joy. It's the kind of longing that becomes especially tender during the holiday season... when the lights go up, the school programs begin and wish lists start appearing on the refrigerator. For many families in the Avondale and Birmingham communities, that longing has often come with a cost. The desire to give has forced some parents into impossible choices: choosing between food and toys, between paying the light bill and giving their child something to unwrap, or between staying out of debt and making Christmas magical.

Over and over, those working at Avondale Samaritan Place hear the same stories. Families describe taking food money to buy gifts or sacrificing bill money to make sure their children have something to open. These aren't stories of irresponsibility; they're stories of love - fierce, protective, sacrificial love. Parents are willing to shoulder hardship if it means their children feel cherished.

Christmas Village at ASP began with a simple idea: What if families could experience the joy of Christmas without the fear of falling behind financially? What if parents didn't have to choose between holiday celebration and household stability?

Inspired by a model they observed in Atlanta, the Canterbury UMC team returned home energized by the possibility of providing brand-new gifts at deeply reduced prices, allowing parents to shop for their own children with dignity and confidence. At Christmas Village, every parent pays just \$5 per child and walks away with three brand-new gifts, children's books, wrapping paper, tape, and even food to support a meaningful Christmas meal.

This model preserves something priceless: Parents get to be the givers. They are not passive recipients; they are active participants, selecting the gifts they know their children will love. This empowers families, protects their budgets, and strengthens the bonds that make the holiday season special.

For families already stretched thin, December can feel overwhelming. Groceries cost more, school schedules shift, and childcare needs rise. Holiday shopping becomes another layer of financial strain. But Christmas Village changes that narrative. Families walk in feeling stressed and leave with relief, joy, and pride.

Teresa, who works closely with families at ASP, hears firsthand how transformational this experience is. Many parents tell her, "Now I can pay my bills and still give my kids a Christmas." That relief is profound. It's more than financial; it's emotional and spiritual.

The ministry's year-round relationships make this impact even more meaningful. Through food cooperatives, snack bag programs, and weekly meals, the team at ASP builds trust and connection long before the holiday season arrives. Christmas Village becomes not an isolated event, but an extension of ongoing care and community.

There's another side to this story: the children. When teens return to school after the holidays, they share what they received. For families facing economic hardship, this can be a painful comparison. Christmas Village helps level the playing field. Teenagers from the community help select gifts for the teen tables, ensuring trendy, exciting items are available. This helps teens feel confident, included, and proud.

This year, the ministry expanded food support as well. Food boxes, casseroles, fruit, baked goods, and even a whole chicken accompany the gifts. These items aren't just extras, they're essential. They ensure families can gather around the table without fear or scarcity.

The beauty of Christmas Village is that it's powered by community. Volunteers handle everything from unloading pods to organizing toys to preparing casseroles. The energy in the room is joyful, full of laughter and kindness. It's a vivid expression of what community can look like when everyone brings their gifts.

Christmas Village reminds us that the holidays don't have to be a season of sacrifice or scarcity. They can be a season of shared strength, hope, and joy.