



FOR CHILDREN WHO WISH
FOR **JUST ONE GIFT**

Q&A with Michele Sagarino

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Cross Catholic Outreach President Michele Sagarino

boxofjoy.org

What is a Box of Joy? Who packs them, and how do they get them to needy children?

Michele: A Box of Joy is a shoebox-sized box that families fill with small, age-appropriate gifts for children in poverty-stricken nations. Cross Catholic Outreach then adds a rosary and The Story of Jesus in the recipients' native language to the boxes and they are delivered to these children to spread Christmas joy. Most of the participants right now come through Catholic dioceses across the country — through their schools, parishes and groups — as well as other organizations, individual folks and families. People jump at a chance to serve God by packing and sending help and hope. If you could see the faces of the kids on the receiving end, you'd see we're hardly packing just toys and supplies; we're boxing up and shipping happiness!

When people participate, how do they know what to give?

Michele: Box of Joy makes it easy. The [website](#) provides a list of helpful suggestions for age and gender. Once you have your list, shop for what you would like to give, like toys or school supplies. Pack the box and donate \$9 [online](#) to cover shipping and local ministry support. If your group is participating, your Project Leader will provide collection details. If you are doing Box of Joy on your own, visit our [drop-off-centers web page](#) to locate your nearest Drop-Off Center.

But for children in dire poverty, is the best response a box of toys?

Michele: Box of Joy doesn't replace other aid — it enhances it. The box is part of a broader response of love. It restores hope and sends a powerful message to a child about their value in God's eyes. The program is just one facet of Cross Catholic Outreach's full mission. Through our network of local partners, we also address the root causes of extreme poverty and respond to emergency needs. But for a child who has never received a gift, there's no better way to combat hopelessness than by sending this message of hope and love. Team Joy volunteers at the Box of Joy Screening Center add a rosary and The Story of Jesus to every Box of Joy gift, which evangelizes our Catholic faith.

Box of Joy sends more than gifts, doesn't it?

Michele: Yes, it does. Two dollars out of the \$9 you donate for shipping is used to support other outreaches and ministries in the child's community. And like all the programs we undertake, the goal is always to bless people both materially and spiritually.



What kind of reception is the Box of Joy ministry getting?

Michele: The growth and involvement amazes us. In 2014, our pilot year, we began with just two dioceses, and that handful of parishes and schools brightened Christmas for kids in Guatemala. We piloted in eight states in 2015 and went nationwide in 2016. In 2021, despite the continuation of the global pandemic, we served children in seven nations — the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua — bringing them 106,276 Box of Joy gifts, almost double what we brought in 2020. The number of participating groups has also increased significantly: In 2014, we only had 29 participating groups, and by 2022 that number was up to 1,254. In total, we've delivered 512,855 boxes to children in need.

Is there an online version of Box of Joy?

Michele: Absolutely. There are two ways to do this: 1) you can donate \$34 **online** and Team Joy volunteers will shop, pack and ship it for you, or 2) you can order items **online** and these items will be packed and shipped in Box of Joy gifts for children.

How can a business get involved in Box of Joy?

Michele: We really appreciate when we receive bulk business donations of discontinued, imperfect or overrun items. They often make great gifts for children. Businesses interested in this option can contact us at boxofjoy@crosscatholic.org. Financial sponsorships are also appreciated.

I'm a Project Leader and need to know how to engage my group/school/parish to participate in Box of Joy.

Michele: We have plenty of activity ideas on our **website** to help Project Leaders plan for a successful Box of Joy ministry. These activities include creating a Joy Meter, having a Family Christmas Party, inviting people to bring enough boxes to create a Christmas Tree, or even hosting a 5K Run for Joy.

What is the organization behind Box of Joy?

Michele: Box of Joy is proudly facilitated by Cross Catholic Outreach, an official Catholic nonprofit 501(c)(3) relief and development organization. Since its founding in 2001, Cross Catholic Outreach has given more than \$4 billion in aid to help the poorest of the poor in more than 90 developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and other parts of the world. It's a privilege to be part of this work that has received so many accolades, including recognition from the Vatican.

If a person or group or church wants to pack a box or become a volunteer, what do you tell them?

Michele: First, we tell them, "Expect to be filled with joy," because everyone who gives joy receives joy in return! Second, go to boxofjoy.org and sign up if you want to lead a campaign for your group. There's also information there for individuals and families. In September and October, Project Leaders for local groups will receive their kits with materials. November 4-12, 2023, is Box of Joy Week. The "volunteer" page gives all the details about volunteering.



Why not just have people send in money?

Michele: Box of Joy is meant to create human connections and build God's kingdom on Earth. Relationships are important to us, so we want to help poor children experience Christmas joy and we want Box of Joy participants to experience the joy of giving. That personal involvement starts as participants select and pack their gifts, knowing that the box they prepare will ultimately be hand-delivered to a special child. Studies abound showing that joy comes not in spending on ourselves but in doing for others. It's also very likely that the Box of Joy opened by the child you packed a gift for will receive nothing else. I repeat: nothing else. When you consider that, it's easy to understand why this program has such a big impact among the children it serves.

Box of Joy is a ministry of Cross Catholic Outreach.

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To learn more, visit boxofjoy.org.

For interviews, contact Kevin Wandra at 404-788-1276 or kwandra@carmelcommunications.com.

About Cross Catholic Outreach

Based in Florida, Cross Catholic Outreach is an official Catholic nonprofit 501(c)(3) relief and development organization that, since its founding in 2001, has given more than \$4 billion in aid to help the poorest of the poor in more than 90 developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and other parts of the world. For more information about Cross Catholic Outreach, visit CrossCatholic.org or call 800-914-2420.



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