

SERVING TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

Thornapple Covenant Church and our Love Mercy Do Justice Ministry Team encourage families to serve together. This document has information on local urban ministries where children are welcome to serve (note age restrictions). There are also many other ways in which children can serve. We've included lists of ideas as food for thought as you seek ways that would work in your family to encourage reaching out and helping others.

These local organizations welcome younger children to serve with their parents:

1. **Family Promise** – Their mission is to help homeless families. In their day center parents can volunteer and bring children as young as 3 years old. For their Partners in Housing program children must be at least 14. They have a page on their website about children and volunteering ideas: <https://www.familypromisegr.org/how-you-can-help/get-kids-involved/>. Location: 516 Cherry St SE. Phone: 475-5220.
2. **Feeding America** – This is a warehouse with food supplied to local pantries and low income people. Information on volunteering is at: www.feedwm.org/volunteer. The minimum age to volunteer is 7 years old accompanied by a parent or guardian. Location: 864 W. River Center Dr. NE, Comstock Park. Phone: 784-3250
3. **In the Image** - In The Image links new and gently-used clothing, household necessities, and furniture for free, with those in need, in a welcoming store environment. Minimum age for children is 8 accompanied by a parent or guardian. <https://www.intheimage.org/> Location: 1823 Division St. Phone: 456-6150
4. **Kids Food Basket** - Makes sack suppers for children at risk in GR. Sign up through their online volunteer hub: kidsfoodbasket.volunteerhub.com. They post volunteer openings 2 months in advance. Children age 5 and up can serve when accompanied by a parent or guardian. 16 and up can serve on their own. Location: 2055 Oak Industrial Dr NE. Phone: (616) 235-4532
5. **United in Christ Ministries** - Ministering to low income people in the Blackhills neighborhood of GR. Minimum age to serve is 8 with parent or guardian. They have opportunities on both weekday evenings and Saturday mornings. More at: <http://unitedinchristgr.com> Location: 1035 Godfrey Ave. SW. Phone: 855-8851

These local organizations welcome older children kids to serve:

1. **Degage Ministries** – They offer help to homeless and disadvantaged people in GR through meals offered, life enrichment services, and accommodations for homeless women. To work in the kitchen at Degage children need to be 16. Younger children can serve alongside adults at the special serving station in the dining room, but this is not recommended for very young children. You can read more about volunteering on their website: <http://www.degageministries.org>
2. **Habitat for Humanity** – Their goal is to provide affordable housing for low income people. They have a garden where kids 10 and up can help with their parents. The garden is used to grow plants to be transplanted at new homes, plus it is used to teach new homeowners about gardening. Older children can help work at the homes (16 and up for landscaping and 18 and up for working in the houses). <https://www.habitatkent.org/>

And here are some miscellaneous ideas – more “outside of the box.”

1. “Adopt” an elderly neighbor. Visit them, help with lawn care or other things around the house, drop off food, take them out, send them cards, invite them over for a meal, make sure they have family to be with for the holidays, etc.
2. Clothes and toy drives. Gather up gently used no longer needed clothes and toys and donate them to places like In the Image, Family Promise or Mel Trotters.
3. Visit your local bulk grocery store, like Sam’s Club or Costco, and stock up on several nonperishable food items. Have the kids pack bags with the items you purchased and deliver them to individuals in need. Keep a few bags in the car so you are prepared when you see a homeless person or someone in need.
4. Degage also has \$2.00 vouchers that can be purchased on their website. Keep vouchers with you and have kids give them to panhandlers who can then use the vouchers to purchase food or a haircut or other services at Degage. Be sure you kids understand what they are for and why they are needed. Learn more and purchase vouchers at: <http://www.degageministries.org/voucher/>
5. Sponsor a family. There are many organizations that give you the opportunity to sponsor a family or a child. Find organizations where you can be a sponsor, like Family Promise. These are often advertised around the holidays.
6. Volunteer your time at a local school, church or retirement community. Call and see what kind of help they could use. It could be cleaning inside, working on their grounds, organizing the toys in the nursery or... the possibilities are endless.
7. Put together a care package for a shut in, or a missionary, or someone in the military and give or send it to them.
8. Clean the house of someone who is sick or pregnant. There may be people you know, or that church can connect you up with, who may be having health challenges. Helping during these times with housework or outdoor work can be a great benefit to them.
9. Clean up trash at a local park. Have your kids get gloves and garbage bags and then help by cleaning up trash and debris at local parks.
10. Random act of kindness. Find a stranger or a family you know and do something kind for them. Send a card. Help a senior carry their groceries to their car. Drop off some cookies. Just be kind to someone — for no reason at all.

Below are ideas taken from an article by Kristen Welch called 100 Ways for your family to make a difference. Here’s the link and most of her list.

<http://wearethatfamily.com/2011/06/100-ways-for-your-family-to-make-a-difference/>

1. Babysit for a single mom
2. Teach compassion with a [Family Giving Box](#)
3. Write a [Family Mission Statement](#)
4. Bake cookies for your local fire dept.
5. Pick up trash at local park as a family field trip
6. Create snack packs for [Ronald McDonald](#) residents or the Grand Rapids [Renucci House](#) residents
7. Welcome a new family to the neighborhood with a dessert and introduction
8. Pray for the poor of the world
9. [Color a Smile](#)-print coloring page to be given to lift someone in need up
10. Make a [baby care kit](#) for a baby in need
11. Take time each week to unplug as a family

12. Donate your time or treasure to the [Make a Wish Foundation](#)
13. Appreciate your church staff in some small, tangible way
14. Do yard work for an elderly neighbor
15. Make a [Life Book](#) for a child in Foster Care
16. Read You [Were Made to Make A Difference](#) as a family
17. Volunteer to [cuddle babies](#) at the hospital (older kids/teens are often allowed also)
18. Read [Christmas Jars](#) as family
19. Save loose change in a jar and give to a needy family at Christmas
20. Take a [family volunteering vacation](#)
21. Stop and say thank you to grocery clerks, waitresses. Ask them how they are doing.
22. [Make a birthday cake](#) for an underprivileged child
23. Serve at home: make each other's beds, clean up someone else's mess
24. Write thank you notes to people who serve you: postman, yard guy, doctor, etc
25. [Sponsor a child](#) monthly through organizations like [World Vision](#)
26. Make [relief kits](#) for disaster relief victims
27. [Sew a sleeping bag](#) for someone in need (easy pattern)
28. Volunteer at a [non-profit](#)
29. Make up some [Hygiene Bags](#) to pass out to local homeless people
30. Put a monthly date on the calendar for a [Family Service Night](#)
31. Take a meal to a new family
32. [Create a card](#) for Habitat for Humanity new home owner
33. Encourage your older children to be a Mother's Helper to a mom with young kids
34. [Fill a backpack](#) to help give a homeless person a lift up
35. Make birthday cards and deliver them to a local nursing home monthly
36. Take your kids to a local [Food Pantry](#) with canned goods to donate
37. Deliver food for [Meals on Wheels](#)
38. Pray as a family on a regular basis for the people in your life.
39. Donate your hair to [Locks of Love](#).
40. Give blood. (Take your kids with you and explain the importance).
41. Donate nice toys to cancer ward at a Children's Hospital
42. Buy a [mosquito net](#) and help prevent malaria
43. Randomly celebrate each other with a special treat, meal, time
44. [Donate school supplies](#) to a classroom in need
45. Compliment and thank the teachers in your life
46. Buy a [soccer ball](#) for a child in poverty
47. [Give a used bike](#) to a homeless person
48. Donate coloring books/crayons to hospital emergency rooms
49. Host a [40 hour famine](#) in your home (fast something!)
50. Give clothes to a family in need (call your church/school to find one)
51. Read to a special needs child
52. Only drink water for 2 weeks, [give proceeds for clean water](#)
53. [Buy a goat](#) for a family in extreme poverty
54. Give a donation in someone's name to an organization you believe in
55. Send your used shoes to [Reuse-a-Shoe](#)
56. Become Certified [Respite](#) Caregivers to give Foster Family's a babysitting
57. Decorate a Christmas tree at an elderly person's house

58. Hold a collection drive: makeup, lotions, etc for women at a shelter
59. [Find a Food Bank](#) near you to volunteer
60. Deliver popsicles to children at a homeless shelter
61. Offer your pet for therapy to the elderly
62. Decorate nursing home rooms of residents with homemade art
63. Have regular “family nights” with games, ice cream, time together
64. Visit the NICU with treats for the doctors and anxious parents
65. Write to unsponsored children
66. Read to patients at a local hospital
67. Plan a [family missions trip](#)
68. Bake cookies, host a bake sale and donate money to the poor or a cause
69. Volunteer at a local animal shelter
70. Plant a garden and share the produce
71. Hold a drive for lightly-used stuffed animals for police stations [SAFE program](#)
72. [Give a micro loan](#) and change a family in a third world country
73. Smile. At everyone.
74. Make care packages for children in the hospital
75. Instead of a birthday gifts, ask for donations for a charity or [food for a food pantry](#)
76. Shop [fair trade](#)
77. Offer to decorate hospital hallways during the holidays
78. Ask your city about volunteering to remove graffiti
79. Host a [Lemon-AID](#) stand and donate proceeds to an urban organization
80. Make no-sew fleece blankets for Hospice
81. Send a [care package](#) to our military
82. Read the Bible together as a family every day
83. Collect shoes for [Shoes for Kids](#) (started by an 11 year old girl)
84. Let kids choose a charity to donate to for one of their Christmas gifts
85. Become a foster family
86. Pay for someone’s drink in Starbuck’s drive-thru. Make sure your kids enjoy the act of kindness.
87. Help your kids starts a neighborhood or school Bible Study with their peers
88. Volunteer to plant flowers for your school/church flowerbeds
89. Make a [Care Bag](#) for a child in need
90. Adopt a child
91. Complain less
92. Start a [Kindness Club](#) with your family
93. Let your light shine!
94. Look for opportunities to be the difference in someone’s life
95. Host a [virtual food drive](#)
96. Purchase gifts through families fundraising for adoption.
97. Make a quilt for NICU families
98. Pay the toll for the car behind you
99. Invite friends to Vacation Bible School
100. Take someone flowers from your garden

NOTE: Thornapple does not claim to endorse every website recommended here, but simply offers these ideas for your consideration.