

September 2026

To all church members

500 Smiles - the Christmas Shoebox Project!



Our church is supporting a local project reaching out to poverty-stricken families in Romania this Christmas. St John's Church, Colchester, has an ongoing link with a Pastor who serves disadvantaged communities in Transylvania, and yearly set themselves a challenge to send shoeboxes full of gifts to at least 500 children.

These families live in appalling poverty. Parents often have to make choices between buying food or fuel and life is a struggle. There is simply no money to buy presents. This is an opportunity for our church to do something practical to give a Christmas present to a child who otherwise will receive nothing. There are suggestions for items to put in the box attached with this letter.

500 Smiles will provide us with the boxes. If you would like to fill a shoe box, ***please complete and return the slip below to order your box. Boxes should be delivered by October half term and will need to be returned to us here at church by 22nd November.***

You can personalise your box by decorating it, although we are suggesting not using Christmas paper, in an effort to be more environmentally friendly. A suggested donation of £3 per shoe box is very helpful in meeting the rising costs of transporting the boxes. All the boxes will be sent in time to reach the children before Christmas.

Thank you in advance, if you would like to know more about the project please visit:
stjohnscolchester.org.uk/romania

500 Smiles - Christmas Shoebox Project

Name _____

Yes, we would like to help this local project and would like to order a box. We understand that there is a suggested donation of £3 towards the cost of shipping the boxes and that the box needs to be returned to church by **22nd November at the latest.**

Matthew 25:35-36 – 'For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

500 Smiles - Packing List Suggestions

IMPORTANT: PLEASE DO NOT INCLUDE ANY SECOND HAND CLOTHES. NEW CLOTHES MUST HAVE THE SHOP TAG OR LABEL ATTACHED



OTHER ITEMS THAT CANNOT BE SENT:

- LIQUIDS OR FOODS (CHOCOLATE, SWEETS, CRISPS etc)
- ANY ITEMS OF CUTLERY
- ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING BOOKS
- TOY WEAPONS

Suggestions for inclusion:

Toys and games	Stationery Equipment	Clothing and personal care
Toy cars etc Plastic toys and figures Small doll or stuffed toy (with CE label) Skipping rope Ball (small or deflated with pump) Musical instrument Puzzle	Pens and pencils Crayons Water colour paints Sharpeners and erasers Note books Colouring books Solar calculator	Toothbrush Comb, hair brush Wrapped soap Flannel Hair clips, bows etc Sunglasses (with UV / CE mark) Hat, gloves, scarf Baseball cap Reusable plastic containers eg plate, bowl, cup, water bottle
<i>You can personalise your box with a photo or Christmas card of you / your family</i>		

Some ideas for different age groups:

Age 2-3 Playdough and plastic cutters, plastic building blocks, finger puppets, stickers, glue sticks, pre-inked stampers

Age 4-6 Stickers, glue sticks, dressing up items e.g. costume jewellery / crown, plastic tools, chalkboard and chalks, small bag / purse, hair bows

Age 7-10 Ruler, bag or purse, hair bows and clips, small backpack or handbag, colourful balls of twine, beads, loom bands

Age 11-14 Adhesive tape, geometry set, wind up or solar powered torch, safety (blunt) scissors, sewing set, non-liquid lip balm, deodorant, compact mirror, nail clippers, magnets, compass

This is not an exhaustive list, use your imagination! Think about whether your box is for a boy, girl or either, but please remember no sharp or fragile items.