

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—DECEMBER 9, 2014

“ELVES” TO FILL CHRISTMAS BASKETS IN SOLVANG

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**Two events:**

Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2014:

**What:** Fifth-graders, wearing elf and Santa hats, will fill food bins for struggling families.

**When:** Large piles of food, filling the church hall to the brim, will be available for photography at 11 am. The children will start between 12:00 NOON and 12:30 PM. They will work for at least one hour, possibly as long as 1.5 hours. You may want to book your schedule from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM to be safe.

**Where:** Old Mission Santa Ines, 1760 Mission Dr., Solvang, CA 93464.

Friday, Dec. 19, 2014:

**What:** Needy families will pick up elaborately decorated gift boxes and 19-gallon food hampers from the program.

**When:** The large, stunningly decorated gift boxes will be available for photography at 12:00 NOON in the Parish Hall. Gift pickup from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

**Where:** Old Mission Santa Ines, 1760 Mission Dr., Solvang, CA 93464.

Real children, wearing elf hats, will help prepare Christmas baskets for financially struggling families at around noon on Tuesday, Dec. 16, at Old Mission Santa Ines in Solvang.

On Friday, Dec. 19, the Christmas Basket Program will give 159 poor families from the Santa Ynez Valley, a big decorated box filled with wrapped presents for each family member. The program, in its 14<sup>th</sup> year, also provides a large hamper of food, including two chickens.

The Christmas Basket Program is a joint volunteer program of the mission and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, an international Catholic charity organization.

“It’s a great program,” said a 25-year-old mother with two sets of twins, ages 4 and 8. “Anything they can give, helps out.” The young mother, a Santa Barbara City College student who lives in Solvang with her construction-worker husband, declined to give her name, saying she did not want people to know that they are financially strapped.

Photojournalists and journalists are invited to Old Mission Santa Ines at 11:00 AM on Tuesday, Dec. 16, when piles of rice sacks, jelly jars, cocoa boxes and more, will fill the large parish hall to the brim. At noon, 24 fifth-graders from Santa Ynez Valley Charter School, wearing elf hats, will take items from the piles and put them into 159 food bins for the recipients.

In teams of four, the children will stack a commercial food cart with, for example, rice sacks, then push the cart down an aisle with plastic food bins on either side. The students will place the right number of rice sacks in each bin. Because the rice sacks are 10 lbs, photographers may see students using teamwork to place the sack in the bin!

Before the children begin, Christmas Basket Program director Genevieve Geyser talks to the students about the meaning behind their task. “I explain that the recipients of the food baskets are people in their own community. And we should be able to take care of our own community.”

Three days later--on Friday, Dec. 19 at 12:00 NOON--photographers and journalists are again invited to the mission, where 35 tables will hold large present boxes, many of which will be stunning, and food bins. Many people come to the mission every year just to see and photograph the elaborately decorated gift boxes.

From 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM, recipient families will come to the mission’s parish hall to pick up their gifts and food. Volunteers will help them load the boxes into their cars, which will be in the parking lot. The food boxes will also contain toiletries, a gift card for a local supermarket, and two chickens donated by El Rancho Market.

The families are adopted by individuals, other families, businesses and organizations, who provide the presents and decorate the inner and outer boxes. The program is still in need of donations to cover the cost of the food in the hampers. All donations are tax-deductible and all funds go directly to the families. Checks may be made out to Old Mission Santa Ines, referring Christmas Basket Program. People who have questions about contributing to the program may contact program director Genevieve Geyser at p) (805) 688-2106 or [genlg@verizon.net](mailto:genlg@verizon.net).