

HOW TO CONDUCT A SUCCESSFUL “EMPTY MANGER” CHRISTMAS CAROLING DAY

During an “Empty Manger” Christmas Caroling Day, pro-lifers gather around an empty manger to sing Christmas Carols at abortion facilities.

The purpose of the event is to bring the joy and hope of Christmas to these places of misery and despair. Children have been saved from abortion when their mothers heard the carols and reconsidered their choice for abortion in light of the Christmas story.

The empty manger is a dual symbol. Like the empty manger lovingly placed in every Christmas crèche in anticipation of celebrating the Nativity of Jesus Christ, it represents the joy that ought to accompany the birth of every child.

The “Empty Manger” Christmas Caroling Day has become an important annual event for pro-life groups across the country. These guidelines will help you to conduct your own successful caroling day.



Create your caroling itinerary.

Your caroling day should be scheduled a week or two before Christmas, ideally on a Saturday, when more people will be available. At the Pro-Life Action League, we schedule our caroling day on the Saturday before Christmas Eve.

If you will be visiting more than one abortion facility, work out your itinerary well in advance. Take into account the proximity of the sites to each other, where most participants are likely to be coming from, and whether you plan to conclude the day with a gathering at a local church or someone’s home. Aim for the most direct sequence of sites possible.

As for where you should stand when you are caroling, it is important to be on public property. This includes most sidewalks and parkways. In some cases, you may be able to carol on private property, if the abortion facility is located in a place like a shopping center with a “semi-public” character. Public property is always best.

Invite fellow pro-lifers to participate.

The Christmas season is a busy time for everyone, so the earlier you can invite people to your caroling day, the better. Two weeks is ideal, but you should give people at least a week’s notice.

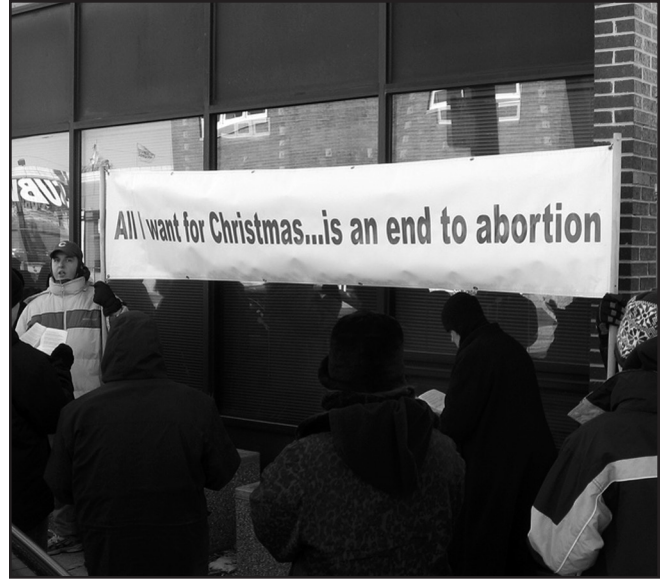
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Reach out to volunteers by every medium possible: e-mail, Facebook, postcards, phone calls. If you have a list of phone numbers, you can even find inexpensive online services that will allow you to record a “robocall.”

Your invitation should include:

- A brief explanation of the caroling day and its purpose.
- The complete itinerary, including times and street addresses.
- A reminder to dress for the weather.
- Encouragement to invite other pro-lifers to participate.

If you are planning to gather with the caroling group for cookies and hot chocolate afterwards (see below), include that in your invitation, too. You might also want to ask a couple to bring a tray of their favorite Christmas cookies.



Print your caroling sheets.

At least a few days before your caroling day, get copies of your caroling song sheets. A great 8-page song booklet is available from the Pro-Life Action League at <http://proliferaction.org/docs/Carols.pdf>. You can download this file—which is designed to work as a folded, stapled booklet—and e-mail it to a local print shop like Fed Ex Office for printing.

Colored paper can make your song sheets or booklets more festive, but be careful not to sacrifice readability (for example, it is difficult to read black text on red paper).

Build your “empty manger.”

With just a couple of eight-foot lengths of 1-by-4 pine, an old broom and a few nails, you can build a great manger to gather around during each caroling site. Find complete directions at <http://proliferaction.org/docs/EmptyMangerPlans.pdf>. Give yourself a couple hours for this project.

Be prepared to deal with police.

Christmas caroling on public property is protected speech under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Still, you may encounter police during your caroling time.

Keep in mind that police are generally required to follow up on any complaints they get, so don’t assume they’re coming to stop you or give you trouble.

You should designate one individual to be the police liaison. That person alone should talk to police. Most likely, the police will simply want to know how long you plan on caroling, and perhaps where you’re headed next. Answer their questions honestly and respectfully.

Sometimes police will insist that you “keep moving” in order to comply with the law, but this is not correct. As long as you are not blocking sidewalks or roadways, you may stand in place as you carol.



Though it's unlikely, police may order you to stop caroling. Respectfully inform them that you have a First Amendment right to continue. If they insist that you stop, or threaten to arrest you, it is best to comply, and later follow up by filing a grievance or even a lawsuit.

Assign key jobs to members of your team.

For a great caroling day, it really helps to assign several important jobs to responsible individuals:

Song Leader: The entire group will sing more confidently if one person leads the singing, setting the pitch for each song. With help from the volunteers, the song leader should vary the set of songs sung at each caroling site.

Photographer: The best way to ensure you get good pictures of your caroling day is to assign someone to be the photographer—preferably someone with a digital camera and the ability to upload pictures to a computer for sharing. The photographer can also be responsible for shooting video, or you may wish to designate a videographer as well.

Song Sheet Distributor: This person not only passes out the song sheets to people as they arrive at each caroling site, but also collects them at the end of each site, encouraging participants who are going to the next site to hold onto their sheets. In colder climates, the song sheet distributor can also offer people hand warmers.

Police Liaison: Most likely you won't encounter police during your caroling day, but if you do, have someone designated to talk to them. See details above under "Be prepared to deal with police."

On your caroling day, bring everything you need.

Song Sheets: Both wet conditions and gloved hands can do damage to song sheets, so bring a few more than you think you need.

Empty Manger: The empty manger can also serve as a vehicle for storing song sheets and hand warmers between sites.

Hand warmers: Participants will really appreciate the special touch of offering them hand warmers—and the warmer they are, the more enthusiastically they will sing.

Flexibility: Be prepared to modify your plans if you encounter bad weather—like freezing rain or extreme cold. Sing fewer carols at each site if conditions are harsh.

Camera with Fresh Batteries: Always bring your camera with you when you do any pro-life activism. But a camera with a dead battery or no room for data is useless, so charge your batteries and clear your memory card in advance.

Refreshments: If you're not planning to gather for hot chocolate and cookies after the last caroling site, you might

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still want to bring along some refreshments to share at the final site.

Take pictures and video of your caroling day.

Always bring your camera to every pro-life activity, including the caroling day. Take plenty of photos; it's better to have too many to choose from than too few. If possible, also shoot some video of the caroling day.

You can share a photo slideshow with others at photo sites like Flickr and on Facebook and Twitter. There are also sites that will allow you to quickly create a video from your photos, complete with background music and special effects.

If you have access to the necessary video production software, you may wish to produce your own short video—one or two minutes, maximum—with your photos and footage. Share your video on YouTube.

If you create a slideshow or video, please send a link to the League at info@prolifeaction.org to include with our annual country-wide round-up of caroling events.

Conclude your caroling day with hot chocolate and cookies.

There's no better way to warm up after a successful caroling day than to gather with your fellow pro-lifers for hot chocolate and cookies at someone's home or a local church. Invite participants to bring a tray of favorite Christmas cookies to share.

Share your caroling experience with the League.

To help spread the word about this great pro-life activity and encourage other pro-lifers, write up a brief account of your caroling day, including anything especially notable like a mother choosing life for her baby after hearing the carols. Please e-mail your account to info@prolifeaction.org.

If you have photos or video to share, please send those, too, or provide links in your e-mail.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Pro-Life Action League's caroling booklet: <http://prolifeaction.org/docs/Carols.pdf>
- Simple Empty Manger building plans: <http://prolifeaction.org/docs/EmptyMangerPlans.pdf>
- Links to caroling groups around the country: <http://prolifeaction.org/hotline/2011/xmas/#others>

