



OAKLAND COUNTY

Jewish volunteers and others step in for Mitzvah Day

Max Bryan | The Detroit News
Dec. 25, 2025, 4:30 p.m. ET



Metro Detroit Christians celebrating the birth of Christ had a chance to take the day off Thursday as Jewish volunteers gathered in their stead to spread holiday cheer and serve up hot meals during Mitzvah Day.

The area's Jewish community typically sends out volunteers every Christmas Day to help provide nonprofits with help as Christians observe the holiday, but organizers said this year's effort was important given the political climate.

Organized by the Jewish Federation Detroit, the volunteers gave their time at eight nonprofits throughout Metro Detroit.



Santa Claus (aka Dr. Ray Hillenbrand) of Birmingham, a volunteer at Jimmy Kid's, carries bags of Christmas toys to cars to be delivered to clients during a Jimmy's Kids event in Detroit on Christmas Day. Clarence Tabb Jr. / The Detroit News Clarence Tabb Jr., The Detroit News

They helped groups "whose staff and regular volunteers are busy with the Christmas holiday," said David Kurzmann, Jewish Federation of Detroit's senior director of community affairs.

Volunteers spent the morning at sites in Detroit. The volunteers then moved north to Jewish Senior Life's Meer Residence in Oak Park and Hope Shelters in Pontiac.



From L to R, Lella Bazzi, of Dearborn and her father, Ali K. Bazzi, volunteers, load a car with Christmas toys to be delivered to clients during the Jimmy's Kids event on December 25, 2025, in Detroit, Mi. Clarence Tabb Jr., The Detroit News

Kurzmann said earlier in the week "several hundred" people had signed up to help.

Mitzvah Day comes less than two weeks after two suspects opened fire on a Hanukkah gathering in Australia, killing 15. The Anti-Defamation League recorded 9,354 incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism and assault in 2024 in the United States.

Kurzmann said Mitzvah Day was especially important this year with the rise of antisemitism.

"We see this as a great, great opportunity, and perhaps can push back against some of those darker currents," he said. The event formerly was touted as a collaboration between Metro Detroit's Jewish and Muslim communities.

The decision to change the messaging was to broaden the appeal of

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Mitzvah Day, Kurzmann said.

"Last year, we were there with friends from the Muslim community, friends from the Hindu community – I mean, anyone who's not celebrating Christmas and has some extra time, we expect to see out there," Kurzmann said. "We know we're not the only community that sees this as an opportunity, so we do that."



Volunteers arrive to pick-up Christmas toys to be delivered to clients during the Jimmy's Kids event on December 25, 2025, in Detroit, MI. Clarence Tabb Jr., *The Detroit News*

One of the first stops for the Mitzvah Day volunteers was at Jimmy's Kids in Detroit at 9 a.m. The charity on Lawndale Street takes care of underprivileged and disadvantaged children as well as their families. Jimmy's Kids was founded in 1988 by Jim Tuman, who died Nov. 12.

Volunteer Emily Broder, who is Jewish, served at Jimmy's Kids with her father and stepmother.

"(We) kind of loaded up our car with several bags of toys and went around to houses in the community and dropped off toys for kids in the community," said Broder. "We had one family who made a special Christmas treat for us. Everybody was very happy and very grateful."

At 10 a.m., volunteers went to Cass Community Social Services on Woodrow Wilson Street in Detroit.

Cass Executive Director Faith Fowler said Mitzvah Day brought "an especially large group of volunteers" to the facility.

"They not only prepped the big Christmas meals, feeding 100 at the Fox Family Center and over 200 at the drop-in center, many of them children, the extra volunteers set up the drop-in center for the children's holiday celebration," Fowler said in a statement. "We are forever grateful to them for generously sharing their time with us."

Kurzmann said any opportunity to take care of people in need is something the Jewish community should participate in.

Broder, too, emphasized giving back to the Metro Detroit community.

"I really enjoy getting to interact with people out there and do something nice on a day that's so meaningful for them," Broder said.

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