

Walking with  
*Moms* in Need



# PARISH ACTION GUIDE



[www.walkingwithmoms.com](http://www.walkingwithmoms.com)

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# INTRODUCTION

This Parish Action Guide is provided to assist parishes in joining the nationwide effort, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. Inspired by St. John Paul II's call to assess our efforts in building a culture of life, the intention of *Walking with Moms in Need* is to increase the Church's outreach to pregnant and parenting women in need. (A brief [summary](#) of this Parish Action Guide is also available. The summary outlines the steps of each phase in a simple, one-page format.)

This Action Guide is designed primarily for use by the parish leader; however, specific sections may be specifically addressed to the pastor. The Action Guide includes specific materials and resources to help parishes participate in *Walking with Moms*, including sample timelines, announcements, prayers, activities, homily notes, and more. While each parish will participate in its own unique way, this Action Guide provides a basic framework and structure that can be adapted to each local Church's needs.

## BACKGROUND

On March 25, 2020, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, the Church celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This prophetic document, written by Pope St. John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life.

In that landmark encyclical, Pope St. John Paul II challenged us:



***With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth. (EV 95)***

In honor of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and in answer to St. John Paul II's call, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Pro-Life Activities is inviting parishes, through the support of their bishops and pastors, to join a nationwide effort entitled: "***Walking with Moms in Need***."

We know the challenges can be immense for women in difficult pregnancies, especially women in poverty. According to 2014 statistics from abortion providers, women who chose abortion were ***poor, young, and unmarried*** (75% were low income, 60% were in their 20's, and 86% were unmarried). They came from ***all cultures and backgrounds*** (39% were white, 28% were black, 25% were Hispanic, and 6% were Asian or a Pacific Islander). And, many of the women who turned to abortion ***reported a religious affiliation***, including a staggering 24% who identified themselves as Catholic (17% were mainline Protestant, 13% were evangelical Protestant, and 8% identified with some other religion).

Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and our neighborhoods, but in desperation, they are turning to other places for help. While many pregnancy help resources are appropriately coordinated at the diocesan or regional level, moms in need are often best reached at the local level. With well over 17,000 parishes in the United States, the Church is uniquely positioned to encourage a collaboration of resources at the local level and to increase awareness of help available to mothers and families in need.

Each parish is best able to identify the local pregnancy help resources that are currently available and to identify potential gaps that need to be addressed. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Evangelium vitae* has provided a wonderful opportunity to assess, expand, and communicate resources to pregnant moms and families in need.

Women facing challenging pregnancies should see the Church as a place where they can find help, especially with its extensive social services dedicated to meeting the needs of people in crisis. But the Church must also honestly assess the pastoral and practical assistance that it currently provides to pregnant moms and families in need and how effective it is in communicating such help to women in need.

As Pope Francis has reminded us, our parishes are called to be “islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference.” Everyone in a given parish community should know where to refer a pregnant woman in need. *Walking with Moms in Need* hopes to help parishes do just that.

To support this effort, the USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities will be providing educational, pastoral, and action-oriented resources to help parishes go to the peripheries and bring hope and help to mothers in need. Through the combined efforts of parishes nationwide, we hope to move closer to the day when every pregnant mother in need knows where to turn for help, and abortion is simply unthinkable.

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## VISION

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This Action Guide and other materials and resources provided for *Walking with Moms in Need* are not intended to be prescriptive. Every parish community and diocese are unique. Parishes are the experts on their community and are best able to understand and respond to the needs and challenges in their local area. It is for this reason that *Walking with Moms* is a parish-based initiative. The provided materials are meant to be *resources* to help equip and empower parishes to reach out to mothers in need in their communities. Parishes are encouraged to adjust and adapt the provided materials as needed.

The *Walking with Moms in Need* initiative may look very different from parish to parish and from diocese to diocese based on the resources and capacity of each local Church community. For this reason, prayer and discernment must be the basis of our united efforts. Bishops, pastors, and diocesan and parish leaders are encouraged to truly allow the Holy Spirit to guide their efforts. At various stages during the process each community will need to prayerfully consider how God is calling them to respond. While it is important to be aware of each community’s capacity, we also should not set limits on what the Holy Spirit can accomplish in each parish.

Through this process, some parishes may discern that they are called to start a new, dedicated outreach ministry to mothers in need, while other parishes may simply begin by committing to print local pregnancy



help resource information in their bulletin every weekend. All these efforts will increase our outreach to pregnant women in need and, in doing so, further help build a culture of life.

Abortion can often be seen as a partisan and political issue which can deter Catholics from participating in pro-life initiatives and activities. Feedback we have received tells us that a parish focus on help for pregnant and parenting moms in need can be a *unifying* message. It can initiate or improve upon the collaboration of those working in various parish ministries and move the conversation from what sometimes seems like a partisan divide into pastoral unity.

Despite how courts and legislatures may treat abortion in the future, our pastoral response must continue to focus on the needs of women facing unexpected or challenging pregnancies. *Walking with Moms in Need* is a response to Pope Francis' repeated challenge to go to the margins and bring hope and help to those in need.

## OVERVIEW OF TIMELINE

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*Walking with Moms in Need* is a yearlong process comprised of a number of simple steps. In essence, parishes are asked to complete a simple inventory of the resources currently available in their local area. After this initial inventory is completed, parishes will be asked to assess the results and identify gaps. Once this assessment has been completed, parishes will begin planning their response and how they can improve outreach in their community, based on their findings.

The provided sample timeline allots a year to complete this process, but parishes are encouraged to adjust this general framework as needed to account for local events, observances, or other schedule conflicts. The [sample timeline](#) provides a simple overview of the process and an example of how it can be incorporated into a parish calendar.

To help parishes plan for and organize their participation in this nationwide effort, this Action Guide is broken up into five specific phases of parish activity. Each phase will be accompanied by specific instructions and resources to allow ease of use at the parish level.

The five phases include:

- **Phase 1:** Introduce *Walking with Moms* and Begin Building a Core Team
- **Phase 2:** Launch Parish Inventory Process
- **Phase 3:** Share Inventory Results and Begin Assessment and Planning
- **Phase 4:** Announce and Commit to Parish Response
- **Phase 5:** Celebrate and Implement Parish Plans

This Action Guide provides all necessary instructions and resources for Phases 1 through 5. Be sure to subscribe to our [email list](#) to make sure you receive all news, updates, and supplemental materials for *Walking with Moms in Need*.

# SAMPLE TIMELINE

Phase 1	Introduce <i>Walking with Moms</i> and Begin Building a Core Team	Notes
[month, year]	Overview of process and parish participation. Appoint a parish leader. Begin assembling core team.	e.g. liturgical seasons, parish events, schedule conflicts, etc.
[month, year]	Pastor introduction to parish and invitation to participate. Call to action to help moms in need. Pray for mothers.	
Phase 2	Launch Parish Inventory Process	Notes
[month, year]	Invite parishioner engagement with personal asks and announcements. Establish and meet with core team.	
[month, year]	Contact diocesan Respect Life office. Review inventory form and process. Launch inventory process.	
[month, year]	Parish volunteers take inventory of local resources for pregnant moms in need.	
[month, year]	Parish volunteers take inventory of local resources for pregnant moms in need.	
Phase 3	Share Inventory Results and Begin Assessment and Planning	Notes
[month, year]	Review and evaluate inventory results. Review ideas and models for a parish response.	
[month, year]	Share inventory results in parish-wide meeting. Invite parishioner engagement in deciding next steps.	
[month, year]	Brainstorm possible parish responses and sample models for offering and communicating help to moms in need.	
[month, year]	Finalize parish plans for offering and communicating help to moms in need.	
Phase 4	Announce and Commit to Parish Response	Notes
[month, year]	Announce plans in parish-wide meeting. Invite parishioner engagement in homily and announcements.	
[month, year]	Develop a strategy to communicate efforts those in need. Begin implementation of parish response.	
Phase 5	Celebrate and Implement Parish Plans	Notes
[month, year]	Celebrate progress and parish plans with parish community. Invite additional parishioner involvement.	
[month, year]	Continue implementation of parish plans. Support pregnant and parenting women in need through prayer.	

# PHASE 1

## Introduce *Walking with Moms* and Begin Building a Core Team

During Phase 1 of *Walking with Moms in Need*, pastors are asked to select a parish leader for this initiative. The parish leader will then begin assembling a parish core team to help complete the parish inventory and related tasks.

During this phase, parishes are encouraged to highlight *Evangelium vitae*'s call to serve pregnant and parenting moms in need and educate the parish on this important encyclical.



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# SIMPLE STEPS

The following simple steps are provided to guide you through Phase 1 of *Walking with Moms in Need*. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided materials to get this initiative started in your parish community. These steps are provided as a framework—feel free to adjust and adapt as needed!

## 1. Appoint a parish leader.

The pastor of each participating parish is asked to appoint a parish leader for *Walking with Moms in Need*. The parish leader acts as a main point of contact and coordinator. See “Selecting a Parish Leader” on page 13 for suggestions on filling this important role in your parish community.

## 2. Begin assembling a parish core team.

Once a parish leader has been selected, he or she, with the guidance of the pastor, can begin assembling a parish core team. The core team will meet together throughout the process and complete various tasks, including the parish inventory, assessment, and response planning and implementation. Your parish can begin inviting members to the core team before *Walking with Moms* has been publicly announced; however, you may decide to wait until the initiative has been shared with the larger community. See “Building a Parish Core Team” on page 15 for suggestions on assembling this team for your parish.

## 3. Establish a parish support network.

In addition to assembling a core team, you also want to begin establishing a broader group to help support *Walking with Moms in Need*. In the beginning stages of this project, you will likely only need assistance from your core team. However, as the project continues, grows, and develops, you will likely need wider parish support. Establishing a simple support network allows you to continue to cultivate interest, share progress, inspire broader parish involvement, and enlist assistance during later phases of the process. See “Creating a Parish Support Network” on page 18 for tips on establishing this network of wider support.

## 4. Introduce *Walking with Moms in Need* and educate on *Evangelium vitae*.

Use the provided sample announcements to introduce *Walking with Moms in Need* to your parish community. Encourage your pastor, priests, and deacons to include this exciting news in their weekend homily using the provided “Homily Helps.” If possible, include one of the provided [educational resources](#) in your bulletin.

## 5. Pray for pregnant mothers in need as a parish community.

When introducing *Walking with Moms*, also use this opportunity to make the “[Prayer for Pregnant Mothers](#)” cards available in parish pews. Ask your pastor if there is a time that you can all pray this together as a parish and encourage regular use of the prayer. You may also consider giving all parishioners copies of the prayer card to take home with them. (Find more ideas in the included sample activity.) Sample intercessions are also provided for use in the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass.

## 6. Begin planning your first core team meeting.

Even if your core team is not fully assembled, begin thinking about when your team can gather for the first time. Consult current members of the core team about their availability and what days and times generally work best with their schedules. Begin thinking about your agenda and what you might hope to accomplish in this initial gathering. Perhaps you want to set up an informal meet-and-greet to begin with. Or, maybe you would like to pray a holy hour together followed by a light meal or dessert. You can begin thinking and praying about this initial gathering without having to make any concrete plans right away.



# SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements can be used to introduce Walking with Moms in Need to your parish community. These can be used in the bulletin and can also be shared as pulpit announcements. Both a full-length and condensed version are provided.

## FULL-LENGTH ANNOUNCEMENT (129 WORDS)

Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and our neighborhoods. As Pope Francis reminds us, our parishes need to be “islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference.” Everyone in our parish community should know where to refer a pregnant woman in need.

Our parish is joining a nationwide effort entitled: “*Walking with Moms in Need.*” As part of this initiative our parish will undertake a yearlong process to assess, expand, and better communicate resources to pregnant moms and families in our local community.

We invite all parishioners to join us as we embark on this journey together. For more information, and to ensure you receive news and updates, please contact: [Name] [Phone] [Email]

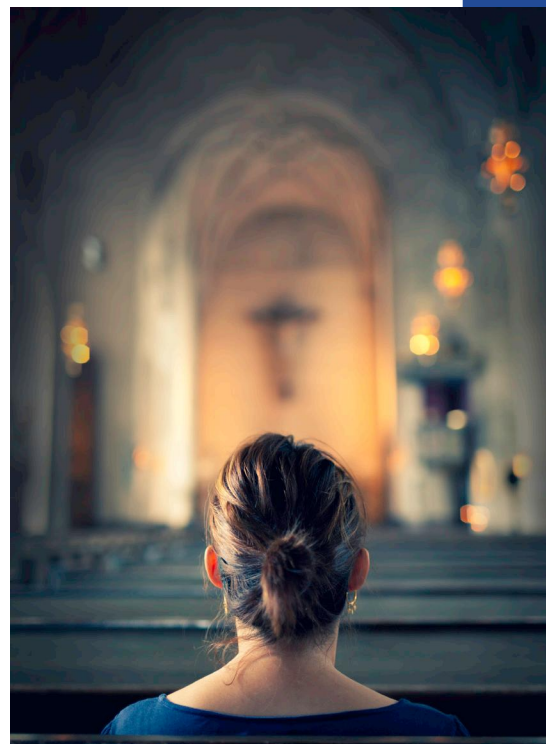
To learn more about the nationwide initiative, visit [www.walkingwithmoms.com](http://www.walkingwithmoms.com).

## CONDENSED ANNOUNCEMENT (101 WORDS)

Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and our neighborhoods. As Pope Francis reminds us, our parishes need to be “islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference.”

In order to assess, expand, and better communicate resources to local pregnant moms and families in need, our parish is joining a nationwide effort entitled: “*Walking with Moms in Need.*”

We invite all parishioners to join us as we embark on this effort to serve mothers in need in our community. For more information, and to ensure you receive news and updates, please contact: [Name] [Phone] [Email]



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## SAMPLE INTERCESSIONS

*Prayer is the basis of all our efforts. The following sample intercessions can be used to unite the entire parish in praying for pregnant and parenting mothers in need. These intercessions are appropriate for use during the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass, but can also be included in bulletins, newsletters, emails, and social media posts throughout the year.*

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For all pregnant women facing difficulties:  
May God grant them His protection, and lead them to places of life-affirming support and compassion;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

For our parish:  
That as we embark on this effort to serve mothers in need, we may be guided by the Holy Spirit, as we build a culture of life;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May our parish community become a place of welcome and assistance for all mothers in need;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May Mary, Mother of the Church, graciously help us to become instruments of God's love and compassion to all mothers in need;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

## HOMILY HELPS

*Homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons incorporate an introduction to Walking with Moms in Need into their weekly homily. These notes are intended to help educate the parish community, announce participation in Walking with Moms in Need, and inspire parishioners to reach out to mothers facing difficulties.*

- Each year the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord (usually on March 25). This celebration commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceived Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God became incarnate in the womb of a woman and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).
- In modern times, the feast of the Annunciation has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend all human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. The Annunciation helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning in the womb. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.
- In order to care for, protect, and welcome new life in the womb, we must first care for, support, welcome, and serve pregnant women, especially those facing difficulties or challenging circumstances. All mothers, like Our Blessed Mother, bear the miracle of new life into the world. In a special way, they are entrusted by God with the gift of life. It is the role of the Church to walk with all mothers, offering support, encouragement, and assistance as they seek to answer God's call in their lives.
- The Solemnity of the Annunciation also coincides with the anniversary of the papal



encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, also known as *The Gospel of Life*. This document, written by Pope St. John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life.

- In *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II challenged us to assess our efforts in assisting pregnant moms in need and to improve our responses, where needed, especially at the local level. In short, to truly accompany each pregnant and parenting woman in need. He writes:

*“With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth.” EV 95*

- In 2020, the Church celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Gospel of Life*. Inspired by that anniversary, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops launched a nationwide effort entitled, “***Walking with Moms in Need***” and invited parishes such as ours to join them. Our parish is undertaking a yearlong process to walk in the shoes of a pregnant woman in need and prayerfully consider how we can increase our outreach to mothers. As a parish we will inventory what pregnancy resources are available in our local area, identify gaps, and make and implement plans to better serve pregnant women in our local community.
- When the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary, she was troubled and confused at the unexpected news, yet faithfully embraced God's plan for her life. As a young, unmarried, pregnant woman, Mary would face many challenges. Today, mothers facing an unexpected pregnancy may have trouble recognizing the great gift God has given them. Concerns about a lack of material and financial resources, as well as physical and emotional support systems often crowd their minds and



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their hearts. Fear and anxiety can push women to believe that abortion is their only option. As Catholics, we know that abortion is never the answer for a woman in need. During challenging periods in our lives, we *all* need the care and support of others. For a pregnant woman in need, the real, tangible support of others can allow her to see a way forward. Knowing she is not alone can allow her to open her heart to God's plan and choose life.

- I am excited to embark on this journey with you, which is so important for our parish and our community. I want to take this opportunity to invite all of you to participate. Please see the bulletin for more information and details on how you can join our parish in serving mothers. We ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we discern how *together* we can build a culture of life by better supporting those who bear the gift of life to the world.

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# SAMPLE ACTIVITY:

## PRAYER FOR PREGNANT MOTHERS

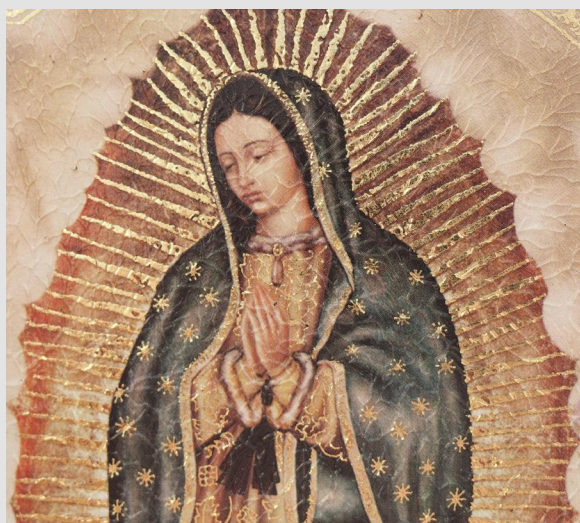
The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has created a “Prayer for Pregnant Mothers” to accompany Walking with Moms in Need. [Prayer cards](#) can be ordered online or downloaded and printed for use in your parish. The text of the prayer is also printed below. The following also includes ideas on how to incorporate this prayer into the life of your parish community and spiritually support your efforts during the Walking with Moms process.

### PRAYER FOR PREGNANT MOTHERS

O Blessed Mother, you received the good news of the incarnation of Christ, your Son, with faith and trust. Grant your protection to all pregnant mothers facing difficulties.

Guide us as we strive to make our parish communities places of welcome and assistance for mothers in need. Help us become instruments of God’s love and compassion.

Mary, Mother of the Church, graciously help us build a culture of life and a civilization of love, together with all people of good will, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life. Amen.



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### IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Consider printing the “Prayer for Pregnant Mothers” in your bulletin each week or once a month, encouraging the parish to pray together at home for mothers in need.
- During the weekend in which *Walking with Moms in Need* is introduced, distribute blessed copies of the prayer card to all parishioners following the weekend Masses. Encourage them to keep it in a central place in their homes and pray it together often as a family.
- Place copies of the prayer in the missalette and hymnal holders of every pew to remind and encourage parishioners to include pregnant mothers in their intentions during their times of prayer. Replenish copies as needed.
- Some parishes offer a communal prayer either at the beginning or end of Mass, or at the conclusion of the Prayer of the Faithful. If your parish has this tradition, consider praying the “Prayer for Pregnant Mothers.”
- Include the “Prayer for Pregnant Mothers” in newsletters, prayer chains, emails and on social media.

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# SELECTING A PARISH LEADER *(for pastors)*

*Pastors are asked to appoint a parish leader as the main point person and coordinator of Walking with Moms in Need. While each pastor must discern who God is calling to take on this important role, we have provided a number of tips, considerations, and suggestions that pastors may find helpful in making their selection.*

## THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX.

When initially considering who to appoint as the parish leader for this initiative, we encourage you to think outside of the box. While a pastor's first impulse may be to appoint the parish DRE, current pro-life coordinator, or other social ministry leader, consider that these leaders already have a long list of responsibilities and may not be able to fully devote themselves to *Walking with Moms*.



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We encourage you to think beyond your first impulses and consider appointing a leader who may not initially be on your radar. Consider asking other ministry leaders for suggestions on who may be well-suited for this initiative. Because ministry leaders work closely with so many different people in the parish in various settings, they may be able to identify candidates who would otherwise be overlooked.

*Are there young adults in your parish excited to serve others and find their place in the Church? Is there someone in your Hispanic ministry who is passionate about serving mothers in need? Do you know of any parishioners who currently volunteer at a local pregnancy center who can bring special knowledge and insight?*

These are just some ideas to consider as you discern who God is calling to this special task.

## REMEMBER THAT WALKING WITH MOMS IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A PASTORAL INITIATIVE.

While your parish may have a number of devoted pro-life champions who enjoy educating others on policy initiatives or collecting signatures for pro-life petitions, the focus of *Walking with Moms* is not political or policy driven. Although these efforts are very important and commendable (and part of the bishops' [Pastoral Plan](#)), this initiative is focused on providing real, tangible support to pregnant women in need. Part of the vision for *Walking with Moms* is to move the conversation from what sometimes seems like a partisan divide into *pastoral unity*.



When identifying possible parish leaders, make sure that you are confident that these candidates understand and can clearly communicate this pastoral vision to the rest of the parish. If the goal is to better reach out to mothers in need, partisan messages can prevent women in need from hearing the most important message of *Walking with Moms*—that the Church is there for them and desires to support them and walk with them during this challenging time.

## CONSIDER THE FUTURE.

While the *Walking with Moms* process is a one-year commitment, depending on what your parish discovers through the inventory and how your parish discerns it is called to respond, implementing your parish plans may take you outside the yearlong timeframe. *Do the candidates you are considering have the bandwidth and desire to continue to shepherd this pastoral initiative beyond the first year?*

This is not to say that the parish leader is the only person that can be appointed to ensure that your parish plans are implemented. The parish leader will also have the support of the core team, of which other members may be chosen for future tasks. However, if you are aware of a specific conflict in time or scheduling, you may want to consider other candidates to ensure consistency. When inviting a candidate to be the parish leader, let he or she know that responsibilities could possibly extend beyond the yearlong process.

## TAKE IT TO PRAYER.

While we know that pastors are incredibly busy, and it may be tempting to appoint a parish leader and move on quickly, we hope that you will be able to devote time in prayer to this decision. Appointing the right person at the beginning of this initiative can very likely save a pastor time down the road. It's important to choose a leader who you feel you can trust to truly take the lead and work well with other parish ministry leaders and staff. The parish leader will likely set the tone for *Walking with Moms in Need* in your parish, especially among the core team. We pray that the Holy Spirit may guide your discernment.



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# BUILDING A PARISH CORE TEAM

*Once a parish leader has been selected, your parish can begin to build its core team. The core team will meet together throughout the Walking with Moms process and complete various tasks, including the parish inventory, assessment, and response planning and implementation. Members of the core team should understand the purpose and vision of Walking with Moms in Need and act as ambassadors of the initiative in the parish. While the entire parish community is invited and encouraged to participate, the core team helps to organize and plan these broader parish efforts. The following information includes a number of tips, recommendations, and considerations to assist you in building a core team in your parish.*

*Remember that these suggestions are only a framework to help you get started. While many of these recommendations mention “ideals,” we also recognize that what is ideal in one parish isn’t ideal in another. You may be facing specific challenges and feel like your circumstances are very different. Don’t be discouraged! You may be surprised by what the Lord will do through your parish with your simple “yes.”*

## CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE ASSEMBLING A CORE TEAM

### 1. Size

From the outset you should consider how large you might want your core team to be. We recommend somewhere between five and ten people. Think about the core team like other committees within your parish. You may even inquire from other parish committees or ministries what size they have found to be most effective for leadership teams.

The size of your core team will likely be influenced by the size of your parish, but not necessarily. What works for one parish, may not be a good model for another. Ideally, you want a core team small enough that you can work together closely and in a manner in which everyone has the opportunity to share their opinions and insight, without creating never-ending meetings. However, you also want your core team large enough to represent the breadth of your parish community.



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Some parishes may have difficulty pulling enough people together for a core team. Others may need to set limits and encourage additional volunteers to get involved by joining the broader parish support network. Keep in mind that while it’s good to consider the size of your core team *before* getting started, this is only to give you an idea. It’s possible that your core team may start off small and grow as the work progresses and new leaders are inspired to join. Let the Holy Spirit guide you, and don’t worry if your team is smaller or larger than you anticipated.



## 2. Diversity

The Catholic Church and its parishes are blessed with incredible diversity among parishioners. Ideally, your core team will represent some of this diversity. When considering who to invite to your core team, think about varieties of age, gender, background, ethnicity, and professional, personal, and volunteer experience. Everyone brings something unique to the table. Assembling a diverse core team will help ensure that your efforts to reach pregnant women in need will be successful. We also encourage you to think about the diversity of your core team reflecting the diversity of potential women in need in the surrounding area. Consider how you can involve and represent your parish's multiple ethnic communities within the core team.

Perhaps you know of someone at your parish who herself was a pregnant mother in need; this firsthand experience can be invaluable as your parish moves forward. Maybe a parishioner works as a professional social worker and has in-depth knowledge of local resources already. Or, a young adult may bring special energy, enthusiasm, and passion to the core team. A retired parishioner may volunteer as a counselor at a local pregnancy center and have invaluable experience to share.

Don't feel pressured to try and hit every diversity point within your core team. This is just to make you aware of the breadth of unique perspectives and gifts that may be available in your parish. While you want the core team to be representative of your parish community, it won't be perfect. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you and discern with your pastor how you can best represent the wonderful diversity of your local community and the diversity of those you hope to serve.



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### 3. Interpersonal Skills

As you begin to consider candidates for the core team, it's also important to keep in mind the interpersonal skills and competencies of those being considered. Every group will likely have its share of conflicts and differences of opinion. What's important is that each member of the core team understands this and can maturely navigate these challenges with respect for all others on the team. As you build your team, keep in mind that everyone needs to be able to work well with others.

All of this is not to say that only the saintliest among us are fit to serve as core team members. Because we're all sinners, we all have occasions in which we treat others in a less-than-virtuous manner. God created some of us with stronger personalities that can sometimes prove challenging. Someone with a so-called "difficult personality" still has something invaluable to offer to the core team. You may discern that such a person is very much needed on your team. This is just a reminder to think about these group dynamics ahead of time. The parish leader or pastor may at times be needed to help manage some conflict; however, all members of the core team should be expected to treat others respectfully at all times.

### 4. Prayer and Discernment

As you prepare to assemble your core team, the most important thing to remember is to take everything to prayer. Ask God what He desires of you and your parish and how He wants you to accomplish His desires. Throughout *Walking with Moms* you will be discerning what God is asking of your parish and how your parish can respond. Create a habit of praying about these decisions, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide everything that you do.

*Pray for the future members of your core team*, that they may be willing to accept God's call. *Pray for your parish*, that it may truly embody a spirit of welcome and assistance to mothers in need. *Pray for your pastor*, that he may be attentive to the Holy Spirit and faithfully guide your team throughout the next year. Bring all your intentions and concerns to God, surrendering all your efforts to Him.

## THE PERSONAL INVITATION

Once you have taken the time to consider everything previously mentioned and spent time in prayer, you'll be ready to begin inviting members to join your core team. The most effective invitation is a *personal invitation*. Nothing can replace this one-on-one exchange, whether it be in person, over email, or on the phone. A personal invite demonstrates that you specifically value that individual and their unique gifts. This individual recognition encourages those invited to see their own gifts and encourages them to put them in the service of Christ and His Church.

Depending on your particular situation, your parish may decide that it would like to put an open invitation in the bulletin or in an email to specific ministry leaders. This can be an effective way of finding volunteers and gauging interest among parishioners. Perhaps this is how your parish has decided to begin assembling a team. After allowing time for an initial response, we would encourage you to follow-up this broader invitation with personal invitations to specific individuals.



# CREATING A PARISH SUPPORT NETWORK

*In addition to building a parish core team, we also recommend establishing a broader parish support network. Not everyone interested in assisting in Walking with Moms in Need will be able to serve as a core team member; however, they may like to receive news and updates and know when volunteer opportunities or related events occur. Perhaps your parish will discern that it wants to sponsor a diaper drive as part of the initiative, or that it would like to provide some sort of childcare service for moms taking night classes. These projects will need wider parish support and extend beyond the service the core team is able to provide on its own.*

*Establishing a parish support network early on will allow you to organically grow this resource. This network can be a wonderful source of tangible and spiritual support to the parish leader and the core team. The following suggestions can help you create a network of support that can be called on as your parish efforts grow and expand. If your support network starts off quite small with just a handful of names, don't be discouraged. Interest will continue to grow as the project progresses and more updates and announcements are shared with the parish community throughout the year. Keep in mind, most of us have to hear about something several times before we take the plunge and sign up.*

- **Create a contact list.**

Following the initial parish introduction to *Walking with Moms in Need*, you may receive a number of calls or emails from interested parishioners who were encouraged to reach out to you by a bulletin or pulpit announcement or during the Sunday homily. As you communicate with these parishioners, sharing information about the initiative and learning about their interests and the gifts they have to offer, be sure to capture their contact information and save it in a simple contact list. Make sure to get their full name, email address, and the best phone number at which they can be reached. During your conversations, make notes about their particular interests, passions, skills, and experience. Consider keeping these general notes in a section of your contact list. As the project moves forward, you may want to ask them for some type of specific assistance. Initially, this list can also provide you candidates to consider for the core team.

- **Send out regular updates.**

In order to keep up momentum and interest in *Walking with Moms*, try to send out regular updates to your parish support network. Hearing from you once or twice a month will help members of your network feel connected and let them know that things are progressing. For example, send a quick note letting your network know that the parish inventory process is beginning with some details on what the process entails. At the outset, if you don't feel like you have much to share or report, consider sending out a quick prayer request. Invite the network to add a specific intention to their prayers throughout the month, allowing them to spiritually share in your parish efforts. Feel free to draft your own intentions or consider using the sample intercessions provided.

- **Expand your network by hosting a sign-up Sunday.**

If you would like to expand your parish support network, consider hosting a sign-up Sunday. This is a great way to share information about *Walking with Moms in Need* and encourage participation. Following all Masses on a particular weekend, enlist members of the core team to staff a table in an appropriate gathering area. Through personal, one-on-one invitations, encourage parishioners to join your parish effort by signing-up for the email list. As your efforts expand, this larger network can be a great resource. More details on hosting a sign-up Sunday can be found in Phase 2 on page 24.

# PHASE 2

## Launch Parish Inventory Process

During Phase 2 of *Walking with Moms in Need*, parishes will continue to assemble their core teams through personal invitations and expand their parish support network. Phase 2 also launches the parish inventory process and once again invites the parish to pray for pregnant and parenting women in need. This is another opportunity to remind the parish community about *Walking with Moms*, continue to answer questions, and encourage parishioners to get involved.



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# SIMPLE STEPS

*These simple steps are provided to guide you through Phase 2 of Walking with Moms in Need. They offer guidance on how to use the provided materials to begin the inventory process in your parish community. These steps are only provided as a framework—feel free to adjust and adapt as needed!*



## 1. Host the first meeting with your core team.

Once your core team has been assembled, begin thinking about when your team can gather for the first time. Consult members about their availability and what days and times generally work best with their schedules. Begin thinking about your agenda and what you might hope to accomplish in this initial gathering. Perhaps you want to set up an informal meet-and-greet to begin with. Or, maybe you would like to pray a holy hour together followed by a light meal or dessert. Feel free to get creative. See “Hosting a Meeting” on page 25 for more ideas and tips for planning your first gathering.

## 2. Gather resources and information from your diocese.

Before beginning your parish inventory, we recommend contacting your local diocesan Respect Life [office](#). Many pregnancy resources are appropriately coordinated at the diocesan or regional level. Your diocesan office may already have completed its own diocesan inventory and be able to provide you with a list of resources within the diocese. This list will be a great resource for you as you complete your parish inventory.

## 3. Review the inventory tool.

The [inventory tool](#) provides a framework and structure to help your parish think about the various resources that a mother in need may find helpful. It provides a simple form in which to compile the information you collect from site visits, phone calls, and research. In the inventory tool, each parish is asked to identify the local pregnancy help resources in their community that are currently available to a woman facing a difficult pregnancy. The needs of pregnant and parenting moms can be overwhelming, and the sources for help may not be apparent to those most needing support. Take time to familiarize yourself with the inventory tool before getting started.

## 4. Announce the start of the inventory process and pray for mothers in need.

Choose a weekend during Phase 2 to update the parish community on the start of the inventory process. Also utilize this opportunity to pray for pregnant and parenting mothers in need. Sample announcements and homily notes are provided to help you share this important update with your parish.

## 5. Begin the inventory process.

The purpose of the inventory process is to find out what resources are currently available and allow you to assess these resources and identify possible gaps. An [inventory form](#) is provided online for you to use to catalog the resources in your local area. See “Completing the Parish Inventory” on page 27 for more detailed instructions on getting started.

# SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements can be used to remind your parish about Walking with Moms in Need and announce the launch of the parish inventory process. These can be used in the bulletin and can also be shared as pulpit announcements. Both a full-length and condensed version are provided.

## FULL-LENGTH ANNOUNCEMENT (149 WORDS)

Our parish recently joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. As part of this initiative our parish will be taking an inventory of the pregnancy resources currently available in our local area, identifying gaps, and planning and implementing responses to better serve mothers in need.

This month members of our parish community will begin the inventory process. Please join us in praying that our united efforts will help ensure pregnant women in need know that they can turn to our parish for support and assistance. Once completed, the results of their inventory will be shared with the parish community.

We invite all parishioners to join us in *Walking with Moms in Need*. For more information, and to ensure you receive ongoing updates, please contact: [Name] [Phone] [Email]

To learn more about the nationwide initiative, visit [www.walkingwithmoms.com](http://www.walkingwithmoms.com).

## CONDENSED ANNOUNCEMENT (105 WORDS)

Our parish recently joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. This month members of our parish community will begin the process of inventorying pregnancy resources in our area. Once completed, the results of their inventory will be shared with the parish community.

Join us in praying that our efforts will help ensure pregnant women in need know that they can turn to our parish for support and assistance.

We invite all parishioners to join us in *Walking with Moms in Need*. To ensure you receive ongoing updates, please contact: [Name] [Phone] [Email]

## SAMPLE INTERCESSIONS

*Prayer is the basis of all our efforts. The following sample intercessions can be used to unite the entire parish in praying for pregnant and parenting mothers in need. These intercessions are appropriate for use during the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass, but can also be included in bulletins, newsletters, emails, and social media posts throughout the year.*

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For pregnant women facing difficulties:  
That they may receive  
peace and encouragement  
through the support of their community;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

For our parish community:  
That the Holy Spirit will guide our efforts  
as we work to increase our support  
of mothers in need;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May our efforts to support mothers in need  
inspire a deeper appreciation  
for all mothers,  
who are entrusted by God  
with the gift of new life;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May each of us gathered here  
renew our commitment  
to protecting human life  
through our support for mothers in need;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

## HOMILY HELPS

*These homily notes, rather than providing specific points based on the readings of the day, are considerations to help priests and deacons incorporate Walking with Moms in Need into their Sunday homily. These notes are intended to help educate the parish, remind the community about the initiative, and inspire parishioners to reach out to mothers in need.*

- In *Evangelium vitae*, Pope St. John Paul II highlighted the heroic role of mothers, writing:

*“There is an everyday heroism, made up of gestures of sharing, big or small, which build up an authentic culture of life... Part of this daily heroism is also the silent but effective and eloquent witness of all those ‘brave mothers who devote themselves to their own family without reserve, who suffer in giving birth to their children and who are ready to make any effort, to face any sacrifice, in order to pass on to them the best of themselves’... We thank you, heroic mothers, for your invincible love! We thank you for your intrepid trust in God and in his love. We thank you for the sacrifice of your life.” (EV, 86)*

- Ask your congregation to take a moment to put themselves into the shoes of a woman facing an unexpected pregnancy. She may feel alone, scared, ashamed, and anxious. She may worry about how to tell her friends and family, fearing rejection or condemnation. She may wonder how she will support her child, providing even the most basic food, shelter, and clothing necessary. She may fear how she will be able to finish school or keep working once her child is born. *How will I afford daycare? Where will we live? How am I going to do this? Who will help me?*



- Consider sharing a story of hope about a mother in need who was able to choose life because of the support and assistance she received. You may have a personal story from your own ministry. A local pregnancy center may be able share a powerful anecdote with you about someone from your own community. (Archbishop Naumann shared one such story in his [presentation](#) to the U.S. bishops at their general assembly.)
- Explain that your parish's participation in *Walking with Moms in Need* is intended to be a channel of God's mercy to those facing these circumstances. By taking time to understand what resources are available in the local community and what might be missing, your parish is taking the first step in improving its outreach to these heroic mothers who are facing incredible challenges. *Walking with Moms* is meant to bring us closer to the day when every pregnant mother in need knows where to turn for help, and abortion is simply unthinkable.

*Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, no. 86 © 1995, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. All rights reserved. Copyright © 2021, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.



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# SAMPLE ACTIVITY: SIGN-UP SUNDAY

*If your parish is hoping to increase interest, involvement, and participation in Walking with Moms in Need, consider hosting a sign-up Sunday. This is a great way to share information about the initiative and encourage engagement and support. Following all Masses on a particular weekend, enlist members of the core team to staff a table in an appropriate gathering area. Through personal, one-on-one invitations, encourage parishioners to join your parish effort by signing-up for the email list. As your efforts expand, this larger network can be a great resource. The following simple steps are provided to help you host your own sign-up Sunday.*

## 1. Talk to your pastor and parish staff.

If you would like to host a sign-up Sunday, communicate with your pastor and/or parish staff for approval. Work with parish staff to reserve a table after all the Masses on a chosen weekend. Inquire about any processes and protocols that you may need to follow in regard to set-up and clean-up. Each parish is different, so be sure to follow all local procedures.

## 2. Set the date.

Once you have received approval to host a sign-up Sunday, think about what a good weekend may be. Consider other parish events and possible schedule conflicts. Be mindful that many people travel over holiday weekends and often attend Mass elsewhere. Think about your own availability and consult with your core team about their ability to help.

## 3. Coordinate volunteers and begin advertising.

Once a date has been set, begin working to coordinate volunteers to staff the sign-up table after all Masses. We recommend having multiple volunteers helping after each Mass to increase one-on-one engagement. Decide who will be responsible for set-up and clean-up. You may need more volunteers beyond your core team. If this is the case, begin by asking those within your parish support network. You should also begin making plans to advertise your sign-up Sunday to parishioners. Use the following sample announcement to advertise in the bulletin the weekend before and/or include it in the pulpit announcements:

Next weekend following all Masses, *Walking with Moms in Need* will host a sign-up Sunday. Volunteers will be available to answer your questions and share ways you can help reach out to pregnant women in need in our community. All parishioners are invited to use this opportunity to learn more about the *Walking with Moms in Need* process and sign-up to support this important initiative in our parish.

## 4. Gather and prepare materials.

Gather the materials you will need for your table. Pens, clipboards, and [sign-up sheets](#) will be required. In addition, consider having copies of the “Prayer for Pregnant Mothers” available. If you have the resources, decorate the table with a simple tablecloth, balloons, or a vase of fresh or silk flowers—anything to make it look eye-catching and inviting. You should plan to set up your table by Saturday afternoon in preparation for the Vigil Mass.

## 5. Invite fellow parishioners to join your efforts.

Once your preparations have been made, your volunteers have been assigned, and your table set up, all that’s left is to do is joyfully invite fellow parishioners to join *Walking with Moms in Need*. Keep in mind that personal invitations are the most effective. And don’t feel that you need to stand behind the table. Utilize your clipboards to move around and better engage with parishioners. Feel free to initiate conversations and don’t feel that you have to wait for someone to approach you.

# HOSTING A MEETING

*For those selected to be a parish leader or a member of the core team, this could be their first time entering into a parish leadership role. The following tips and suggestions for hosting a meeting may be helpful as they begin the Walking with Moms process. Even those who are familiar with parish leadership roles may find these suggestions and best practices helpful.*

## SCHEDULING

The first step in hosting a meeting is selecting an appropriate time and place to gather together. Contact your parish staff for information on how to reserve a meeting space for your group. Depending on the size and resources of your parish, you may need to make arrangements well in advance. Be sure to follow any local policies. It is good to have a sense of what times meeting rooms may be available at your parish as you work with your core team to find a time that works with everyone's schedule.

Reach out to your core team members and inquire about their normal availability for meetings. You can ask them for their overall availability in general, or you can even propose a number of days and times you think might work best. As you move forward, you should get a good idea of a typical timeframe and day(s) of the week that work well for your team members and reservations for parish meeting space. If distance, scheduling, transportation, or any other factors preclude you from meeting in-person, consider the option of meeting virtually via video chat.

When you are ready to set the time for a specific meeting, contact your core team members to confirm their availability and adjust as necessary. A number of online tools are available that allow you to poll the members of your group to see what days and times work best for the majority of your members. (Two popular tools are [Doodle](#) and [SurveyMonkey](#).) While these tools often offer subscription-based services, many also offer very basic scheduling tools free of charge.

## COMMUNICATION

Once you have determined your meeting time, be sure to communicate this information clearly to your group. Talk with your team about the best way to communicate meeting times. Email is typically the most straightforward way to share this information; however, your team may prefer a Facebook event, a group text message, a calendar invitation, or even phone calls. *Do what works for your team.* (An [email invite template](#) is available online.) Whatever method you choose, ask team members to RSVP so you can plan accordingly. You may need to make adjustments or take more detailed notes if a member is unable to attend. We also recommend sending a meeting reminder the day before your scheduled gathering to help ensure attendance. Consider scheduling an automatic reminder email when you set the date of the meeting.

## PREPARATION

In preparation for your meeting, take time to set an overall agenda. An agenda doesn't need to be formal or complex; it can simply be a few notes on what you'd like to accomplish during your time together and a general idea of the order you'd like to complete each task. (A [sample meeting agenda](#) is available online.) You may even want to share your agenda in your meeting invitation or reminder so team members will know what to expect. When thinking about your agenda, be realistic about how long each task or discussion might take. It's okay if things move slower or more quickly than you anticipate. Simply having some sort of plan will help you make the most of everyone's time.





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Think about what materials you might need for your gathering. Consider providing notepads and pens. Are there any specific materials or handouts that you need to have copies of prepared? If you think you might be utilizing a white board, be sure to have markers and erasers. Is there a need for a computer or video player? Take time in advance of the meeting to become familiar with your parish's technology setup and how to work various pieces of equipment. This can save an enormous amount of time and keep you from spending half your meeting trying to get a video to play. (*We've all been there!*) If you need assistance with any technology, ask a member of your core team or someone on the parish staff for help.

You also want to consider the space you will be meeting in. Think about the size, location, furniture arrangement, and any other details of the space that may impact your meeting. Will you be meeting at larger tables, individual desks, or simply just chairs? Perhaps you'd prefer for everyone to sit in a circle, but the space you are using is set up in a classroom format. If you are allowed to move furniture to create a more conducive meeting space, try to do so before everyone arrives. Sometimes you will not be able to make changes to the space you are using. *Just do your best with what is available.* And remember, if you do move furniture, always move it back and leave the space in the condition that you found it. Again, your parish may have specific procedures you will need to follow.

## HOSPITALITY

When hosting a meeting, one of the most important elements is hospitality. You want everyone to feel welcome and comfortable. Be ready to greet members of your core team as they arrive. Try to anticipate any specific needs as best you can. For example, help them find a place to set down their coat or purse. Simple gestures such as this extend a sense of kindness and welcome.

If you have the resources, consider having light refreshments available. Perhaps you can bring some cookies to share. Or your core team members may want to take turns bringing in something for the group. While refreshments certainly aren't necessary, having coffee, sodas, or juice and light snacks available can make your time together more enjoyable. Just be sure to check that you are allowed to have food in your meeting space before enjoying any refreshments.

## PRAYER

Following all your preparations and when you are finally all gathered together, we suggest beginning each meeting with prayer. This gives everyone a time to collect their thoughts, place themselves in God's presence, and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your time together. To begin you may want to lead an extemporaneous prayer, or perhaps take time for silent prayer followed by a simple communal prayer, such as an Our Father or Hail Mary. Ask if core team members would like to take turns leading the opening prayer. If you plan to pray a formulaic prayer together, try to have copies for everyone.

Remember to close your meeting with a prayer as well. Consider using the "[Prayer for Pregnant Mothers](#)" to close each of your gatherings. You may also want to pray for specific items that came up during your discussions. Maybe you would like to pray for guidance or the resolution to some conflict or challenge. And you can always pray for your combined efforts in support of *Walking with Moms in Need*.

# COMPLETING THE PARISH INVENTORY

The Walking with Moms in Need initiative begins by completing your own parish inventory of pregnancy resources in your local area. The purpose of the inventory is to find out what resources are currently available and allow you to assess these resources and identify gaps. The provided [inventory form](#) will help you catalog the resources in your local area. The following instructions are provided to help you, with the assistance of your core team, begin the inventory process. Keep in mind that these are recommendations and can easily be adapted to fit the needs of your parish and diocese.

## SIMPLE STEPS

### 1. Connect with your diocesan Respect Life office.

Before beginning your parish inventory, we recommend contacting your local diocesan Respect Life [office](#). Many pregnancy resources are appropriately coordinated at the diocesan or regional level. Your diocesan office may already have completed its own diocesan inventory and be able to provide you with a list of recommended resources. This list will be a great help as you complete your parish inventory.

### 2. Gather your core team and review the inventory tool and process.

Gather with your core team to review and discuss the inventory process and instructions. Discuss how your team would like to work together to complete the inventory. It may be helpful to split up some of the tasks, allowing each team member to research specific resource types and report back to the group. It can help to break up the inventory into manageable pieces so no one person feels overwhelmed.

### 3. Do the research, make the visits and compile all information.

Now is the time to get busy! Begin compiling the information you'll need to complete the inventory. Complete your online research, make phone calls, schedule visits, and begin building relationships with those providing assistance in your local area. If factors preclude you from visiting or gathering in-person, consider the option of meeting virtually via video chat. Once you have gathered your information, both individually and as a group, compile everything into the inventory form. Not only will this allow you to have all your information in one place, it will also help you to see the bigger picture and begin identifying gaps in resources.

### 4. Share all results with the core team.

Once all the information has been gathered and compiled, gather as a team to share the results of your efforts. If you split up tasks and gathered information individually, have each team member present their findings and discuss the results together. In future phases of *Walking with Moms in Need* it will be helpful for all members of the core team to have an understanding of these results.

### 5. Share your results with your pastor and diocesan Respect Life office.

When your parish inventory is completed, set up a time to share the results with your pastor. With the pastor's approval, also share the completed inventory with the diocesan Respect Life office to assist their efforts at the diocesan level. While a listing of resources at the diocesan or regional level may already exist, they will certainly appreciate knowing what additional resources you may have found at the local level.

## RESOURCES FROM YOUR DIOCESE

Before beginning your parish inventory, we recommend contacting your local diocesan Respect Life [office](#). Many pregnancy resources are appropriately coordinated at the diocesan or regional level. Your diocesan office may already have completed its own diocesan inventory and be able to provide you with a list of recommended resources. This list will be a great help as you complete your parish inventory. Diocesan-provided resource listings are often vetted by the diocese which can provide added confidence in referring mothers in need to other social service organizations.

Each diocese will be very different. Some dioceses sponsor and run their own pregnancy centers. Others may partner with local organizations that are outside the diocesan structure. Still others provide pregnancy counseling and support through the local Catholic Charities office. Diocesan-provided listings are a very helpful starting point and may already reveal gaps in resources. For example, if you are in a large diocese, many resources may be centered around a metro center; however, if you are in a rural part of the diocese you may desire to find other options that don't require such extensive travel. For example, you may know of a food bank in your local area that will better serve those in your specific parish community.

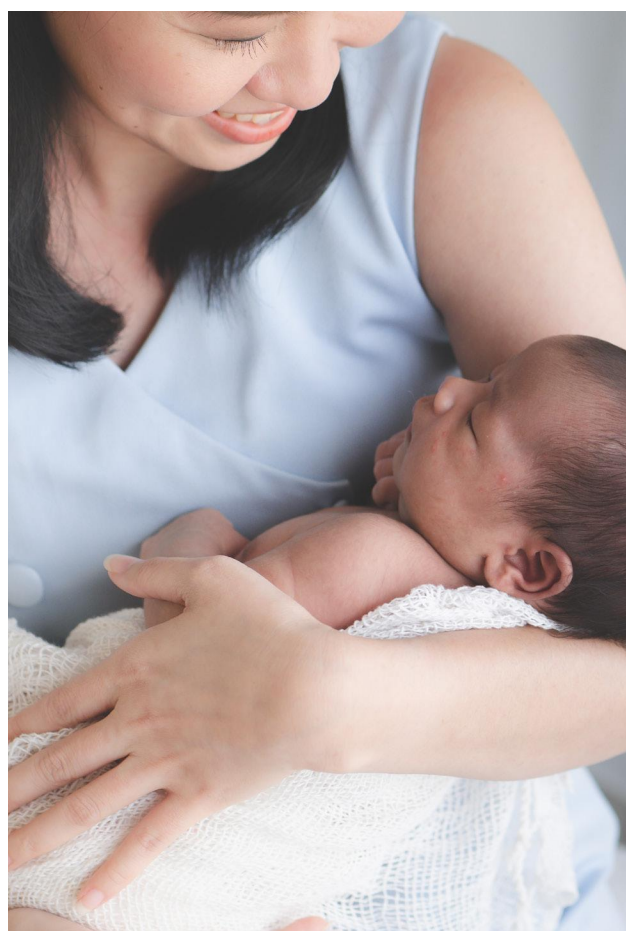
## THE INVENTORY TOOL

In the inventory tool, each parish is asked to identify the local pregnancy help resources in their community that are currently available to a woman facing a difficult pregnancy. The needs of pregnant and parenting moms can be overwhelming, and the sources for help may not be apparent to those most needing support. By completing the inventory, your parish will come to better understand what it is like for a mother in need to navigate these resources during what is often an extremely emotional and challenging time.

The inventory tool helps parish leaders identify local resources for pregnancy assistance such as pregnancy help centers, maternity homes, social service agencies, hospitals and especially Catholic programs and resources. It also asks parishes to begin thinking about how these resources are communicated and advertised to those who are most in need of support.

An electronic version of the parish [inventory tool](#) is available for download. The inventory tool provides a framework and structure to help guide parishes through the process of gathering important information about local resources.

The inventory divides the list of resources into three areas: pregnancy help, general help and help available from the parish. This allows parishes with a limited capacity to focus on the resources that will be *most foundational* to assisting mothers in need. The inventory asks you to cast a wide net in order to get a sense of what resources are out there, but it's okay if you are unable to complete every listing. Many entries on your parish inventory may be left blank. Part of the goal of the inventory process is to identify these gaps, so any fields left empty will help you do just that.



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The inventory tool provides a simple form in which to compile the information you collect from site visits, phone calls, and research. Individual sections of the electronic version will expand to accommodate the information that you add. Remember to save copies of the inventory as you continue to add information to the form.

The completed inventory form is just the first step in a larger process. The information you compile in the inventory is not meant to be the final resource for parish referrals. It is meant to be a working tool for your parish. In later stages, there will be time to assess the results of the inventory and further instructions on discerning what resources are most appropriate and helpful for your particular community.

## THE INVENTORY PROCESS

To get started, gather with your core team to review the inventory process. Take time to review the listing of resources that may have been identified by the diocese. Invite the input of those who may already have experience working with low-income women and families in your community.

One of the most important aspects of parishes completing the inventory process is determining the specific needs and challenges of mothers in your local community. As a group, the core team should take time to put themselves in the shoes of a pregnant woman facing difficulties and imagine what challenges and obstacles she might encounter.

A woman facing an unexpected pregnancy may feel alone, scared, ashamed, and anxious. She may worry about how to tell her friends and family, fearing rejection or condemnation. She may wonder how she will support her child, providing even the most basic food, shelter, and clothing necessary. She may fear how she will be able to finish school or keep working once her child is born. *How will I do this alone? How will I afford to take care of this child? Food? Clothing? Daycare? Where will we live? What if I lose my job? How will I finish school? Who will help me?*

In many ways, by completing the inventory process, you will be stepping into the shoes of a mother facing a very difficult situation or even in desperate need; however, you will have the benefit of a team joining you in this search for resources. Throughout the process, keep in mind the mothers and children in need, and remind your team to stay in prayerful solidarity with them.

As a core team, you can think of the particular challenges in your local area. Perhaps quality medical care is quite a distance away and transportation is an issue. Or, maybe your parish is located in an inner-city area and housing is unaffordable and hard-to-find. Try to identify what your particular local challenges may be.

The inventory divides the list of resources into three areas: pregnancy help, general help and help available from the parish. Discuss how your team would like to work together to complete the inventory. It may be helpful to split up some of the tasks, allowing each team member to research specific resource types and report back to the group. It can help to break up the inventory into manageable pieces so no one team member feels overwhelmed.

Keep in mind that the goal of *Walking with Moms in Need* is not to turn parishes into pregnancy resource centers or social service organizations. The goal is that when any pregnant woman in need contacts your parish for assistance, you are ready and able to refer them to the best resources in your local area. Through our combined efforts, we can move closer to the day when every pregnant woman in need knows where to turn, and abortion is simply unthinkable.

## DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Complete the inventory section on Pregnancy Help-Related Resources.

Pregnancy help-related resources are those most directly related to a woman's pregnancy. Depending on your parish's own capacity, you may only be able to complete this section of the inventory, and *that is okay*. Specifically focusing on these foundational resources is a great place to start.

Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Start with the pregnancy help-related resources that have already been identified by your diocese, such as a pregnancy help center, your local Catholic charities or Catholic social services agency, or another pro-life organization. As previously noted, your diocese may have already compiled a similar list of resources at the regional level. That list can be a great starting point as it may highlight resources in your parish's local area.

Contact your nearest pro-life pregnancy help center (again, a diocesan list may help with this). Even if the pregnancy help center is some distance from your parish, they can be a great resource for referrals to other agencies or programs in your area. Set a time to meet with the staff at the pregnancy help center and let them know about your efforts to walk with moms in need. They will likely be delighted to hear about them.

As your research may take you to some secular or public agencies and health care providers, be aware that they may not share the Church's beautiful vision for marriage, sexuality, and human life. Be prepared to ask questions about their policies on providing or making referrals for abortion, sterilization, and contraception.

Keep in mind that completing the inventory is more than looking up website information or copying someone else's list. It's about making personal connections, building relationships, and having confidence in where your parish might refer a pregnant mother in need. During a time of crisis, you want to avoid sending a mother on a fruitless search for a resource that only leads to a dead end. You are helping to pave the way for her to find the resources that she needs.

### 2. Complete the inventory section on General Help-Related Resources.

If your parish has the capacity, begin inventorying the general help-related resources available in your local area. You may have the capacity to inventory some of these resources, but not all of them. *Do the best that you can*. Even if you can't complete the full inventory, just reviewing the resource types can help you to better understand the scope of assistance that a woman facing a challenging pregnancy may be in need of.

Again, avoid reinventing the wheel. Start with the general help-related resources that have already been identified by your diocese, such as your Catholic charities or Catholic social services agency, a pregnancy help center, or other pro-life organization. If your diocese has already compiled a similar list of resources at the regional level, use this as a starting point to identify resources in your parish area.

Contact your diocesan Catholic charities or Catholic social services agency (again, a diocesan list may help with this). Even if the agency is some distance from your parish, they can be a great resource for referrals to other agencies or programs in your area. Set a time to meet with the staff at the Catholic charities or Catholic social services agency and let them know about your efforts to walk with moms in need. Not only will they be delighted to hear about your efforts, they will also likely be excited to share about the services they offer.



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Again, your research may take you to secular or public agencies and health care providers that they may not share the Church's beautiful vision for marriage, sexuality, and human life. Be sure to ask questions about their policies on providing or making referrals for abortion, sterilization, and contraception.

Again, completing the inventory is about making personal connections, building relationships, and having confidence in where your parish might refer a pregnant mother in need. Your efforts are helping to pave the way for a mother to find the resources that she desperately needs.

### **3. Complete the inventory section on Help Available from the Parish.**

Your parish core team will have the best sense for the resources that are already available from the parish, whether pregnancy-related or general help resources. If such help is not available from the parish, that's okay. Depending on your parish's own capacity, more help may be available than is generally known. Your parish staff will likely be a very helpful in determining what is currently offered.

Parish-based help can be direct assistance, including: baby showers, diaper drives, clothing drives, food pantry collections, friendship, accompaniment, mentoring, and more. Parishes may also help by providing donations to supporting agencies through efforts such as poor box collections, baby bottle campaigns, pregnancy care center fundraisers, or other efforts. Some parishes have volunteer-based ministries in which mothers and families are accompanied with spiritual, emotional, and practical support.



#### 4. Complete the inventory sections on Communicating Pregnancy Help-Resources.

The core team will also have the best sense for how help is communicated by the parish, local agencies, and the diocese. If such help is not available, or if it is available but not well-known, that is very important to note. Even the best resources available can't help anyone if no one knows about them. Continue to place yourself in the shoes of a pregnant woman in need and think about how you would find this information.

#### 5. Complete the inventory section on Additional Resources.

While assessing the findings of the parish inventory will occur more formally in Phase 3, the core team may want to flag particular gaps in services for later consideration. Making notes early on will assist you as you complete later phases.

#### 6. Discuss the inventory findings.

As the core team, compile all the inventory findings. Again, place yourself in the shoes of a pregnant woman facing difficulties and talk about the level of help that is currently available and how well it is communicated to those in need. Prepare to share these findings with your pastor.

#### 7. Share the inventory findings.

Share the inventory findings with your pastor and seek his advice on sharing the inventory results with other parish leaders, such as the parish council. With his approval, also share a copy of the completed inventory with the diocesan Respect Life office to assist their efforts at the diocesan level. While a great deal of wonderful services may well be provided, sharing and communicating those resource can substantially improve their effectiveness.



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# PHASE 3

## Share Inventory Results and Begin Assessment and Planning

During Phase 3 of *Walking with Moms in Need*, parish core teams, in collaboration with their pastor, will review and evaluate the results of the completed parish inventory. They will assess their findings, identify gaps, and begin planning how the parish can respond. The core team will then plan and host a parish-wide meeting in which they share the results of the inventory, propose parish responses, and invite input and feedback from the parish community. Finally, the core team, in collaboration with their pastor, will review all the information and parishioner feedback and determine how their parish will respond.



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# SIMPLE STEPS



*Here is a list of simple steps to guide you through Phase 3 of Walking with Moms in Need. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided materials to assess your inventory results, identify gaps, and begin planning how the parish can respond. During Phase 3, parishes are also encouraged to share the results of the inventory with their community in a parish-wide meeting and invite parishioner feedback and involvement in the parish response.*

## 1. Review the inventory results and evaluate your findings.

Gather with your core team to review and assess the results of your completed parish inventory. During this time, you will evaluate the current resources, identify gaps, and discuss how help is currently communicated to women in need. Depending on the amount of information you gathered, it may take multiple meetings to review the inventory. Begin creating a concise overview that can be shared with your pastor and larger parish community. (See “Reviewing and Assessing Inventory Results” on page 38 for detailed instructions and sample criteria for completing this step.)

## 2. Review sample ideas and models and begin planning your parish response.

Once your core team has evaluated the inventory results, take time to consider ideas and models for a parish response. Think about the gaps you identified and consider ways your parish might decide to address them. Generate a list of ideas that you could propose to your pastor and parish community to better serve mothers in need. (See “Planning a Parish Response” on page 43 for detailed instructions and sample models to get you started.)

## 3. Announce inventory completion and invite parishioners to parish-wide meeting.

In collaboration with your pastor, plan to share the inventory results with the broader community in a parish-wide meeting on a specified date. On the weekends prior, announce the completion of the inventory, and invite parishioners to a parish-wide meeting in the coming weeks to review the findings and get their input. Encourage your pastor, priests, and deacons to include this exciting news in their weekend homilies. (Sample announcements and homily notes are provided.)

## 4. Plan and host the parish-wide meeting.

Before the parish-wide gathering, meet with your pastor to review the inventory results and proposed parish responses that you’re planning to present. Discuss plans for facilitating this larger gathering and collecting parishioner feedback. At the parish-wide meeting, share inventory findings, highlight identified gaps, and discuss possible parish responses. Use this gathering to also invite greater volunteer assistance. (See “Hosting a Parish-Wide Meeting” on page 48 for instructions, sample agendas, discussion tips, and more.)

## 5. Determine plans for offering and communicating help to mothers in need.

With your pastor and core team, review your inventory results and the feedback from the broader parish community. Work together to determine a plan for an appropriate parish response. Share your inventory results and plans for response with your Diocesan Contact Person. (See “Determining Your Parish Response” on page 52 for more tips and suggestions.)

# SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements can be used to announce the completion of the parish inventory and invite the community to a parish-wide meeting to share the results. These can be used in the bulletin and can also be shared as pulpit announcements. Both a full-length and condensed version are provided.

## FULL-LENGTH ANNOUNCEMENT (167WORDS)

Earlier this year our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, “*Walking with Moms in Need*.” One of the first steps in this process was for our parish to take an inventory of pregnancy resources currently available in our local area in order to help us identify gaps and better serve mothers in need in our community.

We are very excited to announce that members of our parish community have completed this important work of taking inventory of local resources. They have also identified possible parish responses for us to consider in light of what they learned. We are excited to share these results and proposed plans with our entire parish community.

All parishioners are invited to a parish-wide meeting to discuss the inventory findings, consider how our parish can respond, and offer your thoughts, ideas, and feedback for serving pregnant and parenting women in need. *Please join us!*  
[Day of Week] [Date] [Time] [Location]

To learn more about the nationwide initiative, visit [www.walkingwithmoms.com](http://www.walkingwithmoms.com).

## CONDENSED ANNOUNCEMENT (116 WORDS)

Earlier this year our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, “*Walking with Moms in Need*.” We are very excited to announce that members of our parish community have completed the initial step of taking inventory of local pregnancy resources currently available. They have also identified possible ways our parish can respond to gaps and opportunities identified. We are excited to share these results and proposed plans with our entire parish community.

All parishioners are invited to a parish-wide meeting to discuss the inventory findings, consider how our parish can respond, and offer your thoughts, ideas, and feedback for serving pregnant women in need. *Please join us!*  
[Day of Week] [Date] [Time] [Location]



# SAMPLE INTERCESSIONS

*The following sample intercessions can be used to unite the entire parish in praying for pregnant and parenting women in need and for the success of Walking with Moms in the parish. These intercessions are appropriate for use in the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass, but can also be included in bulletins, newsletters, emails, and social media posts throughout the year.*

For women facing challenging pregnancies in our community:

May they know that our parish desires to provide assistance and support as they foster the gift of new life;

*We pray to the Lord:*

For our parish community:

That the Holy Spirit will guide and bless our efforts

to increase our outreach and support to mothers in need;

*We pray to the Lord:*

May all those in our parish, who have answered the call to walk with mothers in need, be strengthened and encouraged in their efforts to serve pregnant women in our community;

*We pray to the Lord:*

May all pregnant women who feel alone know that they can turn to our parish for support, assistance, and encouragement in their vocation as mothers;

*We pray to the Lord:*

For our parish:

That as we continue to walk with moms in need, we may be guided by the Holy Spirit, as we work to increase our support of pregnant and parenting women;

*We pray to the Lord:*

For all pregnant women facing difficulties: May they receive the courage and strength to choose life for their children through the love and support of their community;

*We pray to the Lord:*



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# HOMILY HELPS

*These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons incorporate Walking with Moms in Need into their weekly homily, in addition to reflections on the readings of the day. These notes are intended to announce the completion of the parish inventory, invite parishioners to the parish-wide meeting, and encourage the engagement of the parish in serving mothers facing difficulties.*

- Many of you may recall that earlier this year our parish joined a nationwide effort entitled “*Walking with Moms in Need*.” This initiative was launched by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in honor of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This document, written by Pope St. John Paul II, reaffirmed the Church’s constant teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life.
- As part of *Walking with Moms in Need*, parishes are asked to prayerfully consider how they can increase their outreach to mothers in need. As one of the first steps in this process, our parish began to inventory the pregnancy resources available in our local area in order to identify gaps and plan a parish response to better serve pregnant and parenting women facing difficulties in our local community.
- I am excited to announce that, due to the dedicated efforts of members of our parish, we have completed this inventory of pregnancy resources. We are excited to share the results with you and explain some of the ideas we are considering for a parish response. We will be hosting a parish-wide meeting to present this information to you and invite your comments, thoughts, ideas, and feedback. This gathering will be [date] [time] [location]. All parishioners are invited and encouraged to attend. You can also find this information in the bulletin.
- We ask for your continued prayers, support, and involvement in this important initiative to better support pregnant women in our community who may be facing difficult circumstances as they prepare to welcome the gift of new life.



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# REVIEWING AND ASSESSING INVENTORY RESULTS

*Once you have completed the parish inventory, plan to gather with your core team to review and assess the inventory results. Depending on the amount of information you gathered and the number of organizations you identified in addition to listings your diocese may have provided, this may need to be accomplished in a series of meetings. Together, you will evaluate the resources and organizations in each category, identify gaps in the services offered, and assess how resources are currently advertised and communicated to parishioners and those in need of assistance in the community.*

*The following sections guide you through this review process and offer guidance and criteria for evaluating the resource information you gathered. You are also provided with tips and suggestions for identifying gaps and assessing the current approaches to communicating resources.*

## EVALUATING RESOURCES AND ORGANIZATIONS

In completing the parish inventory, you cast a wide net to get a sense of the scope of resources that may be available in your area; however, not all of these resources or organizations may ultimately be helpful in serving pregnant women in need. Some resources may not actually meet the needs of women in your community, and there may also be organizations noted in your inventory that ultimately may not be appropriate to partner with or refer women to. One of the most important steps in this phase is to carefully evaluate the information you gathered. The following guidelines will help you to evaluate the resources your parish identified and determine whether it's appropriate to refer to or collaborate with them.

### ***Compatibility with Church Teaching***

Your research likely took you to some secular or public agencies and health care providers. It is important to be aware that these organizations may not share the Church's beautiful vision for marriage, sexuality, and human life. Part of your research should have included questions about their policies on providing or making referrals for abortion, sterilization, and contraception. Each of these practices directly contradicts Church teaching and undermines the dignity of the human person.

The Church teaches us that "by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man."<sup>1</sup> God desired to dwell among us, as one of us, in order to bring us salvation. This truth "reveals to humanity not only the boundless love of God... but also the incomparable value of every human person."<sup>2</sup>

Each of us is made in the image and likeness of our Creator, to share in the very life of God himself. This reality "reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life."<sup>3</sup> The human person is "a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory."<sup>4</sup> Created through the love of the Father, each one of us bears "an indelible imprint of God."<sup>5</sup> By sharing in our humanity, Christ invites us to share in his divinity, that we might dwell with him for eternity.

The Church teaches that life begins at conception and should be protected from that moment until natural death. Therefore, abortion is never permitted, and every intentional abortion is gravely wrong.<sup>6</sup>

The Church also tells us that married couples are called to embrace the great dignity of their vocation in generously welcoming and opening themselves to receiving new life in the gift of children. Married couples' capacity to conceive and bring forth new life is a very real and beautiful participation in the creative work of God himself.

While the decision to seek, postpone, or avoid pregnancy at a given time in their marriage is entrusted to a married couple's prayerful and prudential discernment, what they cannot do is separate the life-giving aspect of sex from the love-making aspect. (Learn more about cooperating with God's plan for married life and love through the practice of [Natural Family Planning](#).) The sexual act is meant to renew the marital covenant, repeating over and over again, "I give myself to you entirely, unreservedly, holding nothing back." By its very nature, any expression of marital love must be total, faithful, and fruitful.

Sterilization and contraception sever the procreative from the unitive aspect of sex, thereby rejecting one of the three characteristics of married love—fruitfulness. "Fruitfulness" doesn't mean that every time a couple gives themselves to each other in sexual union, a child should be conceived. But it does mean that the couple is open to the possibility each time. Conversely, every time a couple has sex, either using contraception or having been sterilized, their bodies are speaking a kind of half-truth to each other, not giving full expression to the love they have for each other.

Married couples are made to give completely of themselves through the marital act of having sex; holding back their fertility is holding back a part of their very being. When we reject God's design for us, we not only reject his plan—which is always for our ultimate happiness with him—we reject God himself, who loves us more than we can possibly fathom.



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1 Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 22.

2 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 2.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 34.

5 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 35.

6 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 2271.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition © 2000 LEV-USCCB. Used with permission. Excerpts from *Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* © 1965, *Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, © 1995, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. All rights reserved. Copyright © 2020, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.



When evaluating a resource, organization, or agency that you may partner with or refer to, find out whether they promote, perform, or make referrals for abortion, contraception, or sterilization, or violate other Church teachings. Usually, it is not appropriate to direct vulnerable women to such agencies; however, there may be instances in which you may need to utilize the resources of an organization that does not fully act in accord with Church teaching. For example, it may be necessary to utilize the services of a public health center to obtain medical care for a pregnant woman in need. Government-sponsored health centers often do not comply with Church teaching. In these types of situations, it is important to explain these concerns to the mother you are assisting and accompany her as much as possible, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel and the teachings of Christ with regards to married love, sexuality, and the sacredness of human life.

Your diocese may provide additional guidelines and standards for working with outside organizations. Be sure to consult your pastor and your Diocesan Contact Person for help in determining if an organization is an appropriate resource or partner, especially if it was not included in a diocesan listing. As you go through this process, you will likely remove resources or organizations from the inventory. Your goal should be to identify the best resources in your area, so that you will be ready to provide referrals for any woman who comes to the parish seeking assistance. These will likely be the local pregnancy resource centers and Catholic social service agencies with which you began the inventory process; however, you may have discovered additional resources to also keep in mind and refer to.

### Overall Helpfulness and Reliability

The inventory asked you to document a wide range of resources in your local area. Some of the resources or organizations you identified may not be a good fit for you to work with. When evaluating a particular resource or organization, in addition to evaluating their compliance with Church teaching, you should also consider their specific services, availability, distance, dependability, and so forth. *Do the services provided by a particular organization meet the needs of the women in your community? Is the organization open a reasonable number of hours each week? Can this organization be trusted to return phone calls, respond to emails, and provide reliable service overall? Is the organization located within reasonable distance of the parish? In your interactions with the organization, have its members been kind, courteous, and professional? Have you had success in building a relationship with this organization?*



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Ultimately, you need to determine if your parish has confidence in sending a pregnant woman in need to this organization or agency. During a time of crisis, you want to avoid sending a mother on a fruitless search for a resource that only leads to a dead end. Your goal is to obtain accurate contact information and to help pave the way for her to find the resources that she needs most.

Your parish may determine it would like to have a primary and secondary list for referrals. You will likely build strong relationships with a small group of organizations in your local area. However, these primary referral sources may not always offer a specific service needed by a woman in your community. In such cases, it can be good to have a secondary list of additional resources to rely on.



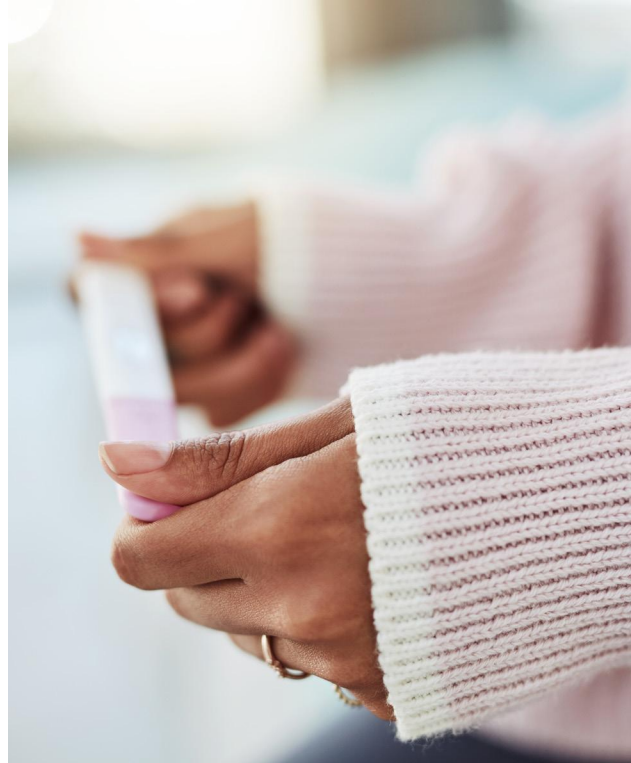
## IDENTIFYING GAPS IN RESOURCES

Another key step in evaluating and assessing your inventory results is determining the specific needs and challenges of mothers in your local community and seeing whether the available resources match these needs. As part of the inventory process, your core team took time to put themselves in the shoes of a pregnant woman facing difficulties and imagined what challenges and obstacles she might encounter. Take some time to do so once again. Begin considering what gaps may exist between these needs and the resources that are readily available. Identify and discuss these gaps with your core team.

One of the simplest ways to identify gaps is to look at the fields left blank in your parish inventory, especially in the area of pregnancy-related resources. For example, you may notice quite quickly that there are no maternity homes in your local area. Housing is a common obstacle for pregnant women in need. If housing also happens to be particularly difficult to find in your local area, this may be a large and pressing gap in available services that you'll want to highlight.

Some gaps may emerge as you evaluate each specific resource or organization. If you have already determined that some resources are not helpful or appropriate, this may reveal a gap. For example, if the nearest food pantry is over an hour away, this may present a challenge to a woman in need. You may determine that this is a gap that needs to be addressed by your local community. In later steps, you'll brainstorm possible solutions to addressing a gap like this.

You may also identify gaps within specific organizations that you hope to partner with. Your local area may have a great resource available, but that organization may struggle to maintain standard levels of service. Perhaps there is a volunteer shortage, or a lack of consistent donations. This may be a gap you want to identify and consider solutions to in later steps in this process.



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## ASSESSING CURRENT COMMUNICATIONS REALITIES

As part of the inventory process, your parish was asked about the methods and frequency of communicating pregnancy help resources. Together with your core team, take time to review the information you collected and get an overall picture of the communication realities in your local area. Your research may have revealed that you have wonderful resources available in your community; however, no one knows about them. Often one of the biggest challenges is getting the word out about what the Church or local community offers.

Take time to put yourself once again in the shoes of a pregnant woman in need. *How would she find out about the resources in your parish, diocese, and local community? What do your survey results reveal?* For example, maybe the local pregnancy center advertises regularly on Catholic radio. This is a great start! However, if the women you are hoping to serve aren't Catholic or are not listening to Catholic radio, they may not know such a wonderful pregnancy center exists.

Now, put yourself in the shoes of an average parishioner who attends Sunday Mass. *How would Catholics in your area learn about these resources? Do they know what is available to offer to a mother in need? If a friend, family member, or coworker were facing a challenging pregnancy, would the average parishioner know that the Church desires to serve this woman with material, emotional, and spiritual support?*

Laypeople are members of the Church that truly go out *into* the world and the community in a different way than clergy. They are often best situated to offer Christ's hope and mercy to those most in need. It's important for Catholics in all walks of life to know what the Church offers.

Finally, put yourself in the shoes of a community member of a different faith or no faith at all. *How would he or she learn about the help available to a pregnant mother in need? Would this person know that they could refer a loved one to the local Catholic parish or diocese for assistance?* The Church is called to be a beacon of light in a world of darkness. Not only is it important for us to share this message of help and hope with fellow Catholics and those needing support, but we should also engage our wider community.

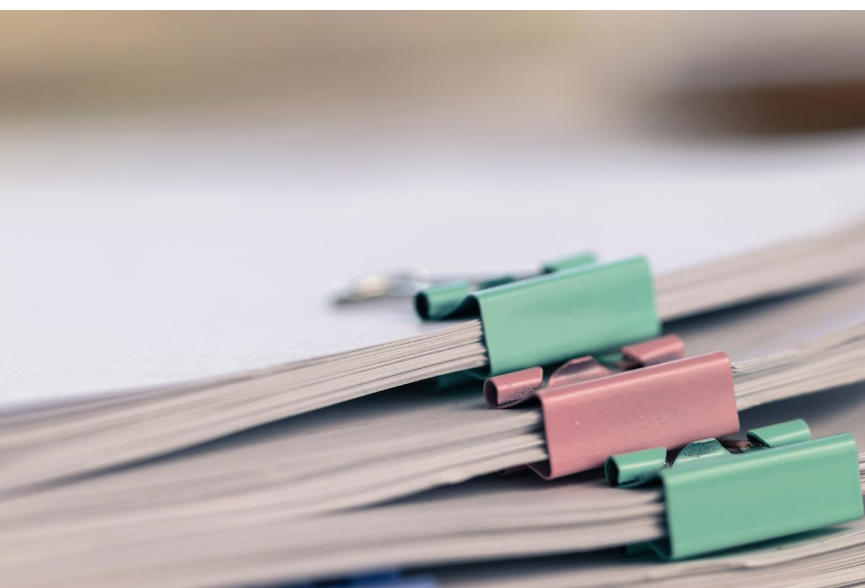
An effective communications strategy requires a multi-pronged approach to reach the various audiences in your local area. We want everyone to know that the Church loves and supports women, and desires to walk with them through the challenges and obstacles of a difficult pregnancy. Take time to determine what gaps and missed opportunities exist in the current communication realities in your local area.

## COMPILING AN OVERVIEW

One of the goals of reviewing and evaluating the inventory results is to be able to compile your findings in a succinct overview that you can present at the parish-wide meeting. This process allows you to get a concise lay of the land to share with the larger parish community. It helps you determine what information is most important and helps you to decide what results are most essential to highlight.

The final step in this evaluation process is to compile a summary of the information you've gathered into an accessible format that can be shared with the parish. You may want to create a PowerPoint presentation, an executive summary or report that can be printed and distributed, or a video of your pastor or a core team member explaining your findings. You may decide to do a combination of these formats. However, we

encourage you to *keep this simple. Do what works for your parish.* The goal is to present the results in the simplest and easiest way possible. You may decide to provide printed copies of the completed parish inventory to those in attendance at the parish-wide meeting, and together walk through the most important results. Don't feel like your summary needs to be overly complicated. Consider summarizing your findings by highlighting the 5–10 biggest takeaways from the inventory process. (Sample presentation formats are available [online](#).)



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# PLANNING A PARISH RESPONSE: SAMPLE IDEAS AND MODELS

Once you have reviewed, evaluated, and summarized the inventory results, plan to gather with your core team to discuss possible parish responses and solutions to the challenges identified. Depending on the number of gaps you identified, this may need to be accomplished in a series of meetings. Together, you will brainstorm possible responses to each gap you identified. Then together, you will consider what an appropriate parish response might be based on your parish's capacity. While your parish will not be able to tackle every gap identified, specific areas may emerge that your parish could come together to address. You may also want to consider working with neighboring parishes to divvy up and address specific gaps in the community. Or, you may want to team up with a nearby parish or two to take on larger projects.

The following sections guide you through this planning process and offer sample ideas and models that can help you get started. However, this is the time to get creative! Your parish has something unique to offer to your community. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide this creative effort to better serve mothers in need in your community.

## BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS TO IDENTIFIED GAPS

During the evaluation of your inventory results, your core team took time to identify the gaps in resources. As part of planning your parish response, your team should go through the identified gaps and brainstorm possible solutions and ways to fill those gaps. While your parish will not be able to fill every gap, this will help you to see what is required to address the gaps in local resources. You may brainstorm multiple solutions in each area. Some of your ideas may not *completely* fill the gap, but they may help to provide a bridge between missing services.

For example, you may have identified a lack of food resources in your local area. There may be a food bank that serves your community, but it is over an hour away and the distance presents an obstacle to mothers trying to feed their families. One solution may be to start a food pantry. Perhaps your parish has the capacity to lead this initiative, or you could think about joining with other area parishes or churches to get this off the ground. Perhaps your parish may not be ready to launch an official food bank, but you want to start by doing periodic food and diaper drives at the parish that would be distributed to mothers in need. Perhaps the food bank that is a little far away would allow members of your parish to pick up food and distribute to those in need in your area. This could help bridge the gap for pregnant mothers or those with small children who are unable to travel a long distance.

This example illustrates the diverse ways your core team may come up with to help bridge gaps in resources in your local community. Filling gaps often does not require launching an entirely new ministry, but simply entails thinking of creative ways to make improvements by working together.

By brainstorming solutions to the gaps in your local area, you'll have a list of possibilities that you can consider and discuss how your parish could respond. Your parish may want to try to address the most pressing need, or you may decide to start small with a simple effort and work up to filling larger gaps. You'll want to consider what your parish's resources and capacities may be and what the most urgent needs are in your community. Let the Holy Spirit guide you through this process. Do not be afraid to dream big because with Christ nothing is impossible. And while your parish may not be able to commit to a large effort right away, you may be able to slowly work toward fulfilling these larger dreams of serving mothers in need. *Do not set limits on what God can accomplish through your parish community!*



## SAMPLE IDEAS FOR IMPROVING PARISH OUTREACH

*The following ideas can be used as jumping off points for your parish to consider as possible efforts to serve pregnant women in need. This list is hardly exhaustive, but it can help you begin brainstorming and serve as a source of inspiration. Keep in mind the unique needs of your community and the gifts and resources that your parish has available. For additional examples of parish efforts, visit our [website](#) where ideas will continue to be shared.*

### Clothing Drive (Baby and Maternity Clothes)

Conduct a clothing drive to benefit a local pregnancy center, maternity home, or Catholic charities agency. Collect new or gently used baby and maternity clothing. If you are collecting clothing for a specific organization, ask them what types of clothing and sizes are most needed, and share this list with the parish community.

### Diaper Drive

Conduct a diaper drive to benefit a local pregnancy center, maternity home, or Catholic charities agency. Consider doing a collection on a regular basis, such as every other month. If you are collecting diapers for a specific organization, ask them what sizes are needed most urgently, and share this information with the parish community.

### Food Drive

Conduct a food drive to benefit a local food bank, pregnancy center, soup kitchen, or parish-based food pantry. Consider doing a collection on a regular basis, such as once a month. If you are collecting food for a specific organization, ask them what items are needed most and share this list with the parish community.

### Volunteer Drive

Host a volunteer-drive in your parish. You may need volunteers to support your parish-based ministry or to help support a community organization that provides pregnancy-related resources or services. Often pregnancy centers,



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Catholic charities agencies, food banks, and other organizations rely on volunteers and are in desperate need for more support. Collect names, contact information, interests, and general volunteer availability of members of your parish. Try to match parishioners with the volunteer needs of the parish or partner organizations. You may even want to organize regular times that a group from the parish volunteers at an outside organization. *The possibilities are endless!*

### Moms Mentoring Program

Many pregnant women in need could use the help and support of a fellow mother as they navigate this complex and emotional stage in their life. Having one-on-one support from a mother who has shared similar challenges and trials can provide much needed encouragement and assistance. Pregnant women could be invited to form a relationship with a “mentor mom,” who can walk with them on their journey and help answer all sorts of practical and spiritual questions. Creating a mothers’ mentoring program can provide mothers in need with the accompaniment they desire.

### “Baby Shower” for a Local Pregnancy Center

Consider hosting a “baby shower” to support your local pregnancy center. Get a list of needed items from the pregnancy center (much like a gift registry) and ask parishioners to bring items on the list to the shower. The center may wish to send a representative to receive the donations.



Sometimes they may even send some of their client moms. During the shower, gather as a community and pray for pregnant mothers (maybe a Rosary!), play music, enjoy cake, snacks, and punch, and play games. Invest in some simple and inexpensive decorations to make it feel like a true party and celebration for all the moms the pregnancy center will be helping. If needed, consider asking for donations or selling tickets to cover the cost of the food and supplies.

### Fundraisers

Host a fundraiser to benefit your parish-based ministry or a local pregnancy-help organization. Ideas for fundraisers could include a baby bottle drive, 5K race, bake sale, craft fair, gala, breakfast, lunch, dinner, afternoon tea, picnic, festival, car wash, second collection, or occasional poor box collection. Get creative and think about what would work best in your specific community.

### Print Pregnancy Resources in Your Bulletin

Commit to printing pregnancy resource information in your bulletin every weekend. This is a great first step for communicating to parishioners and those in need the Church's desire to serve and support pregnant women.

### Childcare Program

Reliable childcare is a significant need for many mothers. Pregnant and parenting women may need help caring for their children so they can earn extra income, take classes, run errands, or go to doctor appointments. Your parish could provide simple, free, childcare by volunteers at the parish on specified days and times each week. Invite mothers in need to submit the days and times they are most in need of childcare and see if you are able to accommodate those hours. *Be sure to comply with all diocesan policies and safe-environment trainings and protocols for working with children.*

### Mothers' Faith-Sharing or Prayer Group

Women facing a difficult pregnancy are often in need of emotional and spiritual support and encouragement. A mothers' faith-sharing or prayer group is a great way to accompany mothers in

need by offering a supportive community. Such groups provide opportunities for mothers to share and discuss the joys and challenges of their vocation in a faith-based environment.

### Parenting or Job Training Classes

Many parishes offer classes and trainings to their parish community to help members develop specific skills, abilities, and talents. For example, parishes may offer language courses, financial trainings, or citizenship classes. Your parish may want to offer parenting or job training classes, which mothers in need may find especially helpful. Consider contacting your local Catholic charities agency to see if they can provide any of these classes in your parish or train parishioners to teach such courses.

### Maternity Home

Many mothers in need struggle to find safe and affordable housing. A local maternity home can be an incredible resource for mothers who need either short or long-term housing. Some parishes have housing or buildings that are no longer being used that could be converted into maternity homes. Parishes may also receive donations of homes or properties from parishioners that could become housing to pregnant women in need. While starting a maternity home is a big undertaking, consider how multiple parishes could come together to support a maternity home. Or consider if your parish could support the diocese or the local Catholic charities agency to get such a project off the ground.



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## MODELS FOR PARISH-BASED MINISTRIES

*Based on your survey results and discernment about what the Lord is calling your parish to do, you may determine that you would like to start a parish-based ministry to provide spiritual and material support to pregnant women in need. This ministry could be an offshoot of an established parish outreach or service committee, or it could be something new entirely. As you think about what your parish-based ministry might look like, we have provided overviews of some existing models. There is certainly no pressure to adopt any particular model listed here. Rather, these are provided to give your parish ideas and inspiration about the shape your ministry may take. If a particular model does happen to resonate with your parish, knowing that others have gone before you can make this effort less intimidating. For additional examples of parish efforts, visit our [website](#) where ideas will continue to be shared.*

### **The Gabriel Project / Project Gabriel / The Gabriel Network** [www.gabrielproject.org](http://www.gabrielproject.org)

Relying on local parishes and dioceses, The Gabriel Project offers hope and assistance to any mother in need. Pregnant women are paired with trained volunteers called “Angels” from a participating parish who support the woman through friendship, encouragement, and prayer throughout her pregnancy. In addition to emotional and spiritual support, the parish volunteers help the expectant mother with various practical needs and connect her with local resources. These practical needs might include the following: pregnancy information and assistance with pre-natal care; maternity and baby clothes, cribs, strollers, and baby items; referrals for housing, medical care, and counseling; and parenting support or adoption information.

The Gabriel Project hosts a nationwide website that provides a directory to local Gabriel Project ministries across the country.

### **Elizabeth Ministry International** [www.elizabethministry.org](http://www.elizabethministry.org)

Elizabeth Ministry is an international movement designed to offer hope, help, and healing on the intimate issues of life, loss, and love. They work to encourage, educate, and equip people through mentoring, programs, and resources related to relationships, sexuality, and childbearing. Elizabeth Ministry serves as a resource center for individuals, couples, families, parishes, hospitals, and other organizations to celebrate the gift of each child conceived and born, and fully mourn each miscarriage, abortion, stillbirth, and infant or child death. They assist people in cherishing children, and witnessing to the dignity of all life, by treasuring the gifts of fertility and pregnancy, supporting those with infertility problems, encouraging people in the adoptive process, and assisting families facing prenatal, infant or children crisis, illness, or special needs. Elizabeth Ministry also works to defend human dignity and relationships by honoring sexuality, promoting chaste living, uplifting the sanctity of marriage, and giving help to those struggling with, or affected by, unhealthy sexual behaviors.

Elizabeth Ministry Chapters are parish-based efforts to support women and their families during the joys, challenges, and sorrows of the childbearing years. Volunteers offer maternal mentoring in the areas they have experienced. For example, a woman who has given birth and raised a family would visit a woman who is pregnant for the first time. She shares prayer, practical help, her lived experiences, and resources in the name of the parish community.

## PREPARES

[www.preparesforlife.org](http://www.preparesforlife.org)

PREPARES is a statewide initiative of the Catholic Bishops of Washington State. They provide pregnancy and parenting support and activities through Catholic parishes across Washington State, serving all families from pregnancy to their child's fifth birthday. All are welcome to participate in the free support that PREPARES provides.

PREPARES supports the commitment to the sanctity of human life, especially in its most vulnerable early stages. It seeks not only to assure healthy births and avoid the tragedy of abortion, but also to provide emotional support to nurture healthy and flourishing relationships that uphold the vision of the family as the essential unit of society. PREPARES works with parishes to develop support for pregnant women and families and vary based on the parish.

The Catholic bishops of Washington State created and launched the PREPARES initiative in 2014. The first of its kind in the United States, PREPARES creates the capacity within Catholic parishes, other faith communities, and collaborating agencies across Washington State to assist pregnant mothers, fathers, and their families by walking with them on the journey from pregnancy to their child's fifth birthday.

In Washington State, PREPARES is provided and coordinated through Catholic Charities of Spokane, Catholic Charities Serving Central Washington, and Catholic Community Services of Western Washington. Through each of these agencies, the Catholic Church provides life-affirming, professional, supportive services for infant children and their mothers and families including prenatal care, counseling, adoption services, and housing and medical care referrals.

## PROPOSED PARISH RESPONSES

At this point you have brainstormed ways to fill the gaps in your local area and reviewed ideas and models for ways your parish could respond. Now is the time to prayerfully discern what your parish may be called to do. In this step, your core team, in collaboration with your pastor, should create a short list of possible parish responses that you would like to propose during the parish-wide meeting. We suggest having some variety in the options you propose to generate greater feedback from your parish community.



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Again, you may want to create a PowerPoint presentation, a list summarizing your proposals that can be printed and distributed, or something else entirely. No matter how you plan to share this information, we encourage you to *keep it simple*. Do what works for your parish. The goal is to present your proposed parish responses in the simplest and easiest way possible and get feedback from your parish community.



# HOSTING A PARISH-WIDE MEETING

Once you have evaluated and summarized the results of the inventory and developed options for how your parish can increase outreach to mothers in need, it is time to share this information with your parish community. We recommend doing so at a parish-wide meeting. (You may even want to consider hosting multiple meetings to reach the greatest number of parishioners.) If your parish has multiple language communities, consider hosting meetings in each language. A parish-wide meeting gives you an opportunity to present the results of the inventory and the proposals your parish is considering as a response to what you learned. The meeting would also allow for open discussion, questions, ideas, and feedback from the larger parish community. The following sections guide you through the process of planning and hosting a parish-wide gathering.

## LOGISTICAL PLANNING

*As you begin to make preparations for your parish-wide meeting, keep in mind that you will use many of the same principles that you used to plan for your core team meetings. The process is very similar, just on a larger scale. (If needed, revisit “Hosting a Meeting” on page 25 to refresh your memory of the basic principles.) To plan the parish-wide meeting you should work very closely with your pastor and parish staff.*

### Scheduling

Meet with your pastor to choose the date and time of your parish meeting(s). Consider his schedule and the overall schedule of the parish. Be sure there are no obvious scheduling conflicts and that your pastor is able to attend. Also make sure the desired location (parish hall, school gym, meeting room, etc.) is available at this time. Take into consideration the schedules of parishioners who would like to attend. For example, a weeknight evening should hopefully allow for parishioners who work during the day to attend. You may also want to consider having childcare available for families with small children so they can participate as well.

### Communication

Once a date, time, and location have been determined, share this information with your parish community, and update any parish schedules or calendars. Sample announcements and homily notes are also provided to help you get the word out. Advertise the meeting in your weekend bulletin, in parish emails and newsletters, on social media, and on bulletin boards in the parish. If you have a parish Facebook page, consider making a Facebook event and inviting parishioners to RSVP there. Be sure to send emails highlighting the meeting information to your core team and parish support network. You may want to solicit their help in planning and hosting the meeting as well. As the date of the meeting draws closer, be sure to send out reminders to your parish community.

### Preparation

In preparation for this parish-wide meeting, work with your pastor to finalize all the information that you plan to present, including inventory results and proposed parish responses. Make sure to get his approval on the agenda, presentation, handouts, and speakers for the gathering. Your pastor may wish to present the inventory results himself, or he may prefer for the parish leader and other core team members to serve as the main presenters. His visible involvement is important, though, so strategize with him on how he'd like to participate. For example, if he prefers not to be the main presenter, after leading the opening prayer, he could provide a brief welcome and overview of the meeting.



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Work with parish staff to have appropriate technical equipment and support, including computers, television monitors, microphones, sound systems, projectors, etc. The anticipated size of your meeting will likely influence the amount of technical equipment you will need. Decide what furniture arrangement you would like, including tables, chairs, and podiums. Recruit members of the core team or parish support network to help you set up and arrange furniture, if necessary.

Decide what handouts you would like to provide parishioners with during the meeting. This could include prayer cards, copies of the completed inventory, the meeting agenda, a summary of the inventory results, a list of proposed parish responses, comment or feedback cards, and so on. If you have multiple handouts, considering making packets and placing them on tables or chairs prior to parishioners' arrival. Be sure to have pens available as well.

Enlist members of the core team to take notes during the meeting. Ask them to record suggestions, positive and negative feedback, and new ideas.

### **Hospitality**

Plan to have members of the core team greet and welcome parishioners and distribute any handouts that you are planning to utilize. Have a sign-in list to collect names and contact information from attendees. Be sure to thank parishioners for their presence and support for mothers in need. If you are planning to have any refreshments available, also have core team members refresh any drinks, snacks, ice, or utensils that may run low during the gathering.

### **Prayer**

Ask your pastor to open and close the meeting with prayer. This gives everyone time to collect their thoughts, place themselves in God's presence, and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your time together. Consider praying the "[Prayer for Pregnant Mothers](#)" together as a community to open and/or close your gathering.

## SHARING RESULTS: FINDINGS AND PROPOSED RESPONSES

As part of the process of evaluating the inventory and generating proposed parish responses, you began to summarize your findings in anticipation of the parish-wide meeting. If you have not done so already, determine how you would like to present the information to the parish. You may want to utilize a PowerPoint presentation, a number of printed handouts, or another format. (Samples are available [online](#).) You will likely want to utilize a number of these options. Keep in mind that you want to present the information in the simplest way possible. A simple PowerPoint presentation can be helpful in guiding the discussion, and simple handouts may help communicate more detailed information to parishioners. Finalize the plans for your presentation and be sure to get your pastor's approval of all content. Work with him to determine who will present different portions of the presentation.

To begin the meeting, following the initial welcome and prayer, ask all those present to take a moment to put themselves in the shoes of a pregnant woman in need. Consider sharing a true story of a pregnant woman in need, with her permission. Walk them through the many challenges and obstacles she may have encountered. Emphasize that the reason we are all here is to help ease those burdens by providing loving and life-affirming support.

Share the inventory results in an exciting and positive manner. Help paint the picture of all the efforts of the core team over the past several months. Highlight the wonderful resources that you have discovered and all the good work already being done in your local area. Try to build excitement and engagement throughout the presentation.

Next, move on to sharing the major gaps you identified. Help to illustrate how these gaps could create obstacles to a pregnant woman. Then lead into your proposed ideas for how your parish may respond in order to help bridge some of these gaps. You may want to pause at different points during the presentation to see if there are

any specific questions that can be answered or clarified. Remind the audience that there will be a time for extended questions and discussion following the presentation.

If your pastor is not making the presentation himself, ask if he would like to make any comments before opening the meeting for large-group discussion.

## SOLICITING FEEDBACK: LEADING A FRUITFUL DISCUSSION

Work with your pastor to determine who will lead the discussion portion of the meeting. He may wish to lead this section and directly respond to parishioners himself, or he may prefer for the parish leader or a member of the core team to do so. If you are chosen to lead the discussion, keep the following tips in mind to help facilitate a fruitful, large-group discussion:

- Following the presentation of the inventory results, open the floor to questions, comments, ideas, suggestions, and feedback.
- When you are asked a question, answer it to the best of your ability. Consult your core team members or your pastor if you are unsure about an answer. If you do not have an answer available at that time, make a note of the question, and try your best to follow-up on it.
- **Listen.** One of the most important aspects of leading a fruitful discussion is to listen attentively to whomever is speaking. Whether comments and feedback you receive are positive or critical, do your best to understand and affirm where that person is coming from. Even if you disagree with their idea or assessment, strive to find mutual points of agreement.
- **Be open.** Graciously accept suggestions for improvement and consider new ideas brought forth. Thank the person for their feedback and let them know it will be taken into consideration.
- **Respond respectfully.** You will likely receive comments and feedback with which you may initially disagree; however, you should



avoid getting into an argument or public disagreement. Always respond to a person's opinions and ideas with respect. While we hope that parishioners will express their ideas and suggestions respectfully, you may receive some rude or impolite comments. Take these in stride and model respectful behavior for them

- **Stay on topic.** Try your best to keep parishioners on topic. Open discussions have a tendency to drift from the specific matters at hand. When possible, politely redirect the discussion to the main topics. Thank parishioners for their thoughts but indicate that these tangential topics may be better suited to a discussion at another time.
- **Give everyone a chance to speak.** Keep comments and questions to a reasonable length. Ask parishioners to keep in mind that the goal is to allow everyone present to have a chance to share. Respectfully interject when needed in order to move on to the next person. Try to avoid circumstances in which one person is controlling the entire discussion.
- **Be aware.** This gathering may draw those who have had a prior abortion experience and who feel the Church was not there for them in their time of need. It would be helpful to have resources discreetly available from your diocesan abortion healing ministry (often called [Project Rachel](#)) in the restrooms, on bulletin boards, and/or in areas near your meeting space. Ask your Diocesan Contact Person for flyers and pamphlets.

Be sure to also have comment cards and pens available during the meeting. (Simple index cards or half sheets of paper work well.) Some parishioners may not be comfortable speaking in front of a large group. Comment cards allow you to still receive their feedback and ideas. They also allow parishioners to share feedback anonymously if they wish to do so. Comment cards are also helpful if you are unable to get to everyone who has something to share. If time runs out, invite those still waiting to speak to share their ideas on the provided cards.



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## INVITING VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

As your meeting draws to a close, be sure to genuinely express your gratitude to all parishioners who attended the meeting. Share with them the great encouragement that their presence was to the pastor and the core team. Thank them for actively engaging in this important effort to reach out and support pregnant women in need in your community. And thank them for their ideas, comments, and suggestions. Assure them that all these will be taken into consideration as you determine how your parish will respond.

Also use this opportunity to invite everyone present to join your parish support network. Explain that the next phases of *Walking with Moms in Need* will require the help of the entire parish community. Let them know that by signing up, they will be kept in the loop and receive ongoing updates and will also be made aware of opportunities for further involvement like volunteering. Follow up this wider invitation to join the parish's efforts with personal invitations, especially to those who may need extra encouragement.

The most effective invitation is a *personal invitation*. Nothing can replace this one-on-one exchange, whether it be in person that evening or at a later time, or in a personal follow-up email or phone call. A personal invitation demonstrates that you specifically value that individual and his or her unique gifts. This individual recognition encourages those invited to see their own gifts and realize that their gifts are needed by women facing difficult pregnancies.

# DETERMINING YOUR PARISH RESPONSE

All your efforts so far in support of Walking with Moms in Need have led to this critical step. The inventory process, the evaluation of the results, the preliminary plans for a parish response, and the parish-wide meeting have all led to this decision point: determining how your parish will increase outreach to pregnant women in need. During this time, we suggest that the core team gathers once more to pray and consider all the information and the feedback from the parish-wide meeting. (Consider praying a Holy Hour together as a core team.) Together, and in collaboration with the pastor, they should discuss and discern what commitments the parish will make to serve mothers in need. Plans for your parish response should then be finalized and presented to the pastor for approval. Use the following steps to help you finish this critical part of process.

## 1. Consider the Needs of Your Community

Gather all the information you have compiled so far, including the feedback and ideas from your larger parish community. Review the information and think about what the biggest obstacles may be for pregnant women in your specific community. Think about the solutions you brainstormed for bridging or completely eliminating these gaps. *What are the biggest challenges facing your community, and what can be done to address them?*

## 2. Assess the Capacity of Your Parish

Now, take a step back to think about the resources and capacities of your parish community. *What challenges or obstacles does the parish have in meeting the needs of pregnant women in your community? Are these challenges financial, material, or spiritual? Can these obstacles or challenges be overcome?* Think about the particular gifts of your parish community. *Has your parish been blessed with financial or material resources? Do you have the blessing of a devoted community of faith with numerous volunteers? What are the unique gifts that God has given to your parish community? What professional skills and education might particular parishioners be willing to lend to our efforts?* Think about how the gifts and resources of your parish community align with the needs present in your local area. *What gaps may your parish uniquely be able to fill? How can your parish make the biggest impact? Should you devote your efforts to a single, large project? Or, are there several smaller projects you can take on to make a broader impact?*



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## 3. Seek the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

Ultimately, determining how your parish will respond to the inventory results is best made after receiving wisdom, understanding, and counsel from the Holy Spirit. Your responsibility is to discern what the Lord is asking of the parish community, and, in the words of our Blessed Mother, “do whatever He tells you” (John 2:5). Take time individually and communally to pray about your parish response and share what God has revealed to you. Remember that improving support for moms in need is a process, and that it’s okay to modify or expand your response down the road. The point now





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is to plan next steps. As the saying goes, “Don’t let the perfect become the enemy of the good.” Work together to build a consensus about how the Lord desires your parish to serve pregnant women in your community. While final decisions are appropriately entrusted to your pastor, share with him what God has been revealing to you through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### 4. Commit to Plans for a Parish Response

Once a final determination has been made by your pastor, share the plans with your core team. Trust the discernment of your pastor and parish community, and commit yourselves to fulfilling God’s will for *Walking with Moms* in your parish. Once your plans have been determined, remember to share them and your inventory results with your Diocesan Contact Person.

#### 5. Pray for pregnant women and the success of your parish plans

Continue to lift up in prayer pregnant women in need as a parish community. Regularly pray the “[Prayer for Pregnant Mothers](#).” Also, commit to praying regularly for the specific efforts that your parish will undertake. Ask the Lord to open the hearts of all those in your parish community, that they may joyfully contribute to bringing your parish plans to fulfillment.



# PHASE 4

## Announce and Commit to Parish Response

During Phase 4 of *Walking with Moms in Need*, parishes will announce and commit to their specific parish response to better serve pregnant women needing assistance in their communities. The core team will plan and host a parish-wide meeting in which the plans for a parish response are shared with the community. The core team, in collaboration with their pastor, will also develop a communications plan to share the parish efforts with the wider community. The parish will then begin to implement their plans for serving mothers in need.



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# SIMPLE STEPS

*Here is a list of simple steps to guide you through Phase 4 of Walking with Moms in Need. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided materials to announce your determined parish response to the larger parish community. Parishes are again encouraged to host a parish-wide meeting and invite parishioner involvement in efforts to offer and communicate help to mothers in need.*

## 1. Share the plans for your parish response with the parish community.

Announce the completion of plans for your parish response, and invite all parishioners to a parish-wide meeting. In collaboration with your pastor, use the parish-wide meeting to inform parishioners about your plans to assist mothers in need and invite them to get involved. Encourage your pastor, priests, and deacons to include this exciting news in their weekend homilies. (Sample announcements and homily notes are provided.)

## 2. Continue to pray for pregnant mothers in need as a parish community.

When announcing the upcoming parish-wide meeting, use this opportunity to pray the “[Prayer for Pregnant Mothers](#)” together as a community and to encourage regular use of the prayer. Include intercessions for pregnant mothers and your parish efforts in the Prayer of the Faithful during Sunday Masses. (Sample intercessions are provided.)

## 3. Plan for and host the parish-wide meeting.

Work with your pastor and core team to finalize the parish-wide meeting agenda. Consider fun and creative ways to engage your parish community, increase attendance, and encourage involvement in your parish plans. During the parish-wide meeting, review the needs of pregnant mothers and unveil the proposed parish plans to offer help and increase outreach. Invite parishioner support, share a proposed schedule for implementing the plans, and seek additional volunteers from the meeting attendees. (See “Committing to and Implementing a Parish Response” on page 59 for ideas and suggestions for sharing this exciting news with your parish community.)

## 4. Develop a communications plan to share your efforts with those in need.

Once your parish plans have been determined, gather with your core team to discuss how you can communicate your ongoing efforts to parishioners and those most in need of assistance. It is essential that the community knows the ways your parish is working to serve pregnant women and families in need. (See “Communicating Help for Mothers in Need” on page 62 for tips on getting the word out to your community.)

## 5. Begin implementation of the parish plans.

In collaboration with your pastor, begin implementing your parish plans. Engage the help of the core team, parish support network members, and new volunteers. A parish response could range from listing the local pregnancy help center in the parish bulletin to a more substantial commitment to launch a new ministry or effort. Some plans will require additional meetings and volunteer trainings. (See “Committing to and Implementing a Parish Response” on page 59 for ideas on implementing your parish plans.)

# SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements can be used to announce the finalization of plans for a parish response and to invite the community to a parish-wide meeting to learn more about these plans. These sample announcements can be used in the bulletin and can also be shared as pulpit announcements. Both a full-length and condensed version are provided.

## FULL-LENGTH ANNOUNCEMENT (155 WORDS)

This year our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers in difficult circumstances entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. Over the past several months, dedicated members of our parish community took inventory of pregnancy resources available in our local area and identified gaps in services for pregnant women in need. We then gathered as a parish community to learn about the results of the inventory and discuss ways that our parish could respond.

We are very excited to announce that through much discernment and the helpful feedback of our parish community, we have finalized plans for how our parish can respond. We are excited to share these plans with our entire parish community.

All parishioners are invited to a parish-wide meeting to discuss these plans, steps for moving forward, and opportunities for greater parishioner involvement. *Please join us!*  
[Day of Week] [Date] [Time] [Location]

To learn more about the nationwide initiative, visit [www.walkingwithmoms.com](http://www.walkingwithmoms.com).

## CONDENSED ANNOUNCEMENT (127 WORDS)

Last year our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers in difficult circumstances entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. Members of our parish community have since taken inventory of pregnancy resources available in our local area and identified gaps in services for pregnant women in need. These results were then shared with the parish community, as we gathered to discuss ways that our parish could respond.

We are very excited to announce that we have finalized our plans for a parish response and would like to share these plans with our entire parish community.

All parishioners are invited to a parish-wide meeting to discuss these plans, steps for moving forward, and opportunities for greater parishioner involvement. *Please join us!*  
[Day of Week] [Date] [Time] [Location]





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## SAMPLE INTERCESSIONS

*The following sample intercessions can be used to unite the entire parish in praying for pregnant women in need and for the success of Walking with Moms in Need in the parish. These intercessions are appropriate for use in the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass, but can also be included in bulletins, newsletters, emails, and social media posts throughout the year.*

For our parish community:  
Guided by the Holy Spirit,  
may we renew our commitment  
to serve mothers in need;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

For all expectant and parenting mothers,  
especially those facing difficulties:  
May God grant them the grace  
to always recognize life as a gift;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May God bless our parish's efforts  
to serve and support  
pregnant and parenting women in need  
in our Church and in our community;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

For all pregnant and parenting women facing difficulties:  
May they come to know  
the love of God the Father through the assistance and  
support of His Church;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May all expectant mothers  
be lovingly supported  
as they embrace the beauty and goodness  
of their vocation as mothers;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

## HOMILY HELPS

*These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons incorporate Walking with Moms in Need into their weekly homily, in addition to reflections on the readings of the day. These notes are intended to announce the completion of plans for a parish response and invite parishioners to the parish-wide meeting to learn more.*



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- Many of you may recall that earlier this year our parish joined parishes across the country in a nationwide effort entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. As part of this yearlong process, we were asked to prayerfully consider how we can increase our outreach to mothers in need. As one of the first steps, members of our parish began taking inventory of the pregnancy resources available in our local area, as well as identifying gaps.
- We then gathered as a parish community to learn about the results of the inventory process. We also discussed possible ways that our parish could better serve women in our local community who are in difficult circumstances and are pregnant or parenting young children.

- I am excited to announce that we have finalized our parish plans for serving mothers in need. We will be hosting a parish-wide meeting to share these exciting plans with you and to discuss next steps and opportunities for greater parishioner involvement. This gathering will be [date] [time] [location]. All parishioners are invited and encouraged to attend. You can also find this information in the bulletin.
- We ask for your continued prayers, support, and involvement in this important initiative to better support pregnant and parenting women in our community who may be facing difficult circumstances as they embrace the gift of life.

# COMMITTING TO AND IMPLEMENTING A PARISH RESPONSE

*Once your parish has decided what efforts you will undertake to support pregnant women in need, it is time to share these plans with the larger parish community. We recommend doing so in a parish-wide gathering. It is important that the parish, as a whole, commits to these efforts and helps with their implementation.*

*The following sections help guide parishes through the process of sharing their plans with the wider community, inviting broader involvement from parishioners, and implementing and sustaining efforts to serve local mothers in need.*

## HOSTING THE PARISH-WIDE MEETING

Much like in Phase 3, your parish is encouraged to host a parish-wide meeting to share your plans for supporting pregnant and parenting women in need. You will follow the same basic steps and practices for this parish gathering as you did previously. The same principles and best practices still apply for presenting the plans, soliciting parishioner feedback, and encouraging parishioner involvement. The biggest change will be the content that you cover in your presentation. Review the steps laid out in “Hosting a Parish-Wide Meeting” from Phase 3 (page 48) as you plan this gathering.



When planning the presentation for this parish-wide meeting, consider offering a brief summary and review of the inventory results and identified gaps that were covered in the previous meeting. (Sample presentation formats are available [online](#).) Hopefully, engagement in *Walking with Moms in Need* will have continued to grow since your last gathering, and you will have many new parishioners joining you. Provide this brief overview to refresh everyone’s memory and provide a foundation for those who may have been unable to attend the last gathering. This will help bring everyone up-to-speed and provide context for the plans you will unveil.

Once you have covered the background, share your plans and parish commitments with the larger parish community. Consider sharing your discernment process and how your pastor and/or core team settled on this particular parish response(s). Depending on where you are in your planning process, discuss your plans for implementation, allocation of parish resources, and the greatest needs for making these plans successful.

When you have concluded the presentation portion of the meeting, shift into a time of large group discussion. Before opening the discussion, it may be worth reminding parishioners that the focus of the conversation should be on ideas and questions about how these plans can be accomplished, rather than a time to question or debate the parish response that has already been determined by your pastor. While parishioners should be welcome to share their concerns or highlight possible challenges, guide the discussion towards what the parish community can do to address or overcome these obstacles, and encourage those raising concerns to suggest possible solutions.



While accepting the current plans for a parish response, parishioners may still wish to express *additional* ideas that the parish could take on to serve pregnant women in the community. Take note of these suggestions, thank parishioners for their input, and acknowledge that your parish efforts could continue to grow over time. Explain that, at this time, your parish is focusing on these specific plans, but the parish remains open to the movements of the Holy Spirit and what God wants to accomplish through your specific parish community.

*Remember to work closely with your pastor when planning this event.* Be sure to get his approval of all presentation content and handouts. His *visible* involvement remains very important, so strategize with him on how he'd like to participate. For example, if he prefers not to be the main presenter, after leading the opening prayer, he could provide a brief welcome and overview of the meeting. Because pastors ultimately determine the parish's efforts in support of *Walking with Moms*, it may be especially helpful to have the pastor participate and respond directly to parishioners during the discussion portion of the meeting.



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## INVITING BROADER PARISH INVOLVEMENT

In addition to inviting broader parish involvement through the parish-wide meeting, you should also consider expanding participation in other ways. It is important for your parish community to fully embrace the efforts to walk with mothers in need. One of the goals of this initiative is to share the truth that the Church desires to walk with and support pregnant women in need. To do so successfully, the wider parish community needs to know what the Church offers, and often the best way they can understand this message is to be personally involved. As members of the Body of Christ, each of us is called to serve those who are most in need.

In addition to building parishioner support through parish-wide meetings, volunteer drives, or Sign-up Sundays (see page 24), consider other creative ways that you can involve your parish community in your parish response to *Walking with Moms in Need*. Depending on what plans your parish has undertaken, the possibilities for parishioner involvement will look different. Encourage members of your core team and parish support network to personally invite one other parishioner to get involved. They can invite them to join a prayer initiative, get on the email list, contribute to a fundraiser or donation collection, or participate in an upcoming volunteer opportunity. Such a personal, direct connection and invitation goes a long way toward making others feel welcome, needed, and invested.

Think about what particular assistance, skills, or resources your parish community needs to fulfill your plans for helping mothers in need. *Do you know of anyone in your community with the gifts and talents to help meet those specific needs?* If so, personally ask if they would be willing to share their gifts to support this parish initiative. Or, include a message in your parish bulletin with a list of the current needs you are struggling to fill. For example, you may need assistance from a parishioner who has experience with graphic design, teaching parenting classes, or caring for young children. Advertise these needs and invite parishioners to contact you. Many people are more likely to get involved if they know they have a specific skill set you are in need of.

Another great way to increase parishioner involvement is to partner with other established parish ministries and committees. Think about ways you could involve your youth group, faith formation [religious



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education] students, men's and women's groups, or outreach ministries in *Walking with Moms*. For example, if your parish has decided to host a "baby shower" to support a local pregnancy center, think about how different groups in your parish could participate. You could ask your youth group to help create decorations for the shower and decorate before the event. Students in your faith formation classes could be asked to bring in small donations to purchase a "gift" for the shower; together, each class could contribute a needed item like a box of diapers or a baby outfit. Perhaps your outreach committee already has a group of dedicated cooks that support regular bake sales; ask if they would be willing to help provide refreshments for the shower. These are great ways to encourage members of your parish community to both personally invest in and unite together in supporting *Walking with Moms in Need*.

## BEGINNING THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

After sharing your plans with the parish community and inviting parishioners to greater involvement, now is the time to finally begin implementing your plans. Depending on what your parish has decided to undertake, the implementation process will take shape in different ways from parish to parish. For example, if you have decided to launch a parish-based ministry, the first step may be gathering the material and financial resources necessary to get things off the ground. If you've decided to offer a childcare program or parenting classes, your first step may be to consult with diocesan staff on safe environment requirements so you can recruit volunteers and have them appropriately trained and certified. Now is the time to think through this process and determine the specific steps your parish will need to take to accomplish this larger goal.

While Phase 5 will more specifically focus on implementation of parish plans, now is a great time to start thinking about what that process may include. In collaboration with your pastor, take time to meet as a core team and discuss a strategy for implementing your parish plans. Consider what additional leadership roles may need to be filled. Think about budgets, timelines, and overall resources, and consider how these factors may impact your strategy. Brainstorm who might be helpful to talk to. Do you know anyone who has experience with a piece of what you're trying to accomplish? What parish, diocesan, or civil authorities do you need to consult with? As always, take all of this to prayer, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the implementation process.



# COMMUNICATING HELP FOR MOTHERS IN NEED

No matter what specific plans your parish has ultimately committed to, part of your parish response should be to develop a communications strategy. All your wonderful efforts to support mothers in need may go unnoticed and underutilized if you do not effectively communicate them to your community. The following ideas and best practices are provided to help your parish create a communications plan. Your plan does not need to be overly complex. You can take simple steps to help get the word out about help that is available in your local community and that the Church desires to help and support pregnant and parenting women in need.



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## BEST PRACTICES

*When developing your communications plan or drafting specific communication pieces, it is helpful to keep some basic best practices in mind. The following list provides a few key principles to assist you in sharing your parish efforts and local resources with your broader community. Keep in mind that this list is hardly exhaustive. We encourage you to check with your pastor and your local diocesan communications team to see if they offer additional guidelines, tools, or best practices that you should be aware of. We also suggest that you keep your Diocesan Contact Person and/or Diocesan Communications Office updated on your communication efforts on an ongoing basis.*

### Audience

One of the most important steps in developing a communications plan is to identify and understand the various audiences you are trying to reach. For *Walking with Moms in Need*, the three broad audiences that should be engaged are those in need of assistance, those in your parish, and those in your larger community. To effectively reach each of these audiences, it is helpful to take time to put yourself in their shoes. For example, consider how a pregnant woman in need would learn about and benefit from resources in your parish, diocese, or local community. *Would she know where to find help or what your parish has to offer?* Think about the average parishioner who attends Sunday Mass. *How would they learn about pregnancy support offered through your parish or nearby?* Consider members of the broader community who are of a different faith or no faith at all. *Would they know that they could refer a loved one to the local Catholic parish or the diocese for pregnancy assistance?* As Catholics, it is important for us to share with the world the desire of the Church to walk with pregnant women facing difficulties.

Keep in mind that at different stages in the implementation of your parish response, you may identify additional or more specific audiences you would like to reach. There may be a need to reach a certain population within your parish community, especially different language or cultural communities. If this need arises, take time to consider the needs of those particular audiences and how they can best be reached.



## Message

Every audience is unique, with different needs and different ways of communicating. When you think about reaching these various audiences, consider if you need to tailor your message to specific populations. In addition to tailoring the message itself, you'll also want to consider the method(s) you use to deliver your message.

The overarching theme behind all our communications for *Walking with Moms in Need* is that Church desires to support pregnant women in need and walk with them through the challenges of a difficult pregnancy, but there may be subtle differences in how you want to share this message. Those in need of assistance will need to be assured that compassionate help is available and where to find it. Those in your parish will need to hear about your parish response and how they might support it. Those in your larger community should know about the Church's efforts to serve pregnant and parenting women facing difficulties.

*Keep your audiences in mind, but don't feel like you need to overcomplicate your approach.* In many instances, the same message can serve multiple purposes and multiple audiences. For example, by printing pregnancy help resources in your bulletin each week, you can offer direct assistance to a woman in need while also educating your parish community about the Church's desire to serve expectant mothers. When in doubt, *keep it simple*.

## Tone

Throughout your communications, strive to maintain a positive, uplifting, hopeful, and life-affirming tone. Be careful to avoid language that could come across as jarring, confrontational, divisive, political, or judgmental. Remember that *Walking with Moms in Need* is a pastoral initiative focused on providing real, tangible support to pregnant women in need. Part of the vision is to move the conversation from what often seems like a partisan divide into *pastoral unity*. While there are many different opinions and predictions as to how courts and legislatures may treat abortion in the future, whatever judges and lawmakers may do, our *pastoral* response must continue to focus on the needs of women facing unexpected or challenging pregnancies.

## Method

An effective communications strategy requires a multi-pronged approach to reach the various audiences in your local area. We want everyone to know that the Church loves and supports women, and desires to walk with them through challenges and obstacles they may face while pregnant or parenting young children in the midst of difficult circumstances. This requires us to use multiple communication tools and mediums to reach the greatest number of people. While the weekly parish bulletin is a great place to start, many parishioners do not read the bulletin. We encourage you to be creative and strategic when considering how to incorporate various media platforms.

Keep in mind that different audiences have different preferred methods of communication. For example, younger parishioners are more likely to get information through social media, rather than the bulletin, so it is important to utilize both of these communication formats. The following section highlights several options and mediums you should consider including in your communications plan.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT

*No matter what your specific parish plans may be, it is critical that you work to effectively share your efforts with your community. The following mediums are all great ways to help get the word out. Keep in mind that your audience and message may influence how you utilize each of these mediums.*

### Weekly Bulletin

We encourage every parish to commit to printing pregnancy help information in every Sunday bulletin. The regular inclusion of this information demonstrates the parish's commitment to supporting pregnant women in need and ensures this information is readily available to those needing assistance. A woman facing an unexpected or challenging pregnancy may be afraid to seek help from the Church, fearing that she will face judgment or stigmatization. Regularly including information about the resources available to help her not only with her pregnancy, but also after her baby is born, can help assure her that the Church desires to *walk with her*, not condemn her.

### Pulpit Announcements

If your parish regularly includes pulpit announcements during weekend Masses, consider including regular announcements (perhaps, monthly) related to help for pregnant and parenting moms of young children. These announcements could be about your specific parish efforts to support mothers or could include general information about resources in your local area. More women than we realize consider abortion, and often women in need of support during or after pregnancy are in our pews each weekend. These announcements can offer hope, allowing pregnant women to know that they are not alone and that the Church desires to walk with them.

### Weekly Homily

Another great way to highlight the Church's desire to walk with mothers in need is to include information, examples, and anecdotes related to pregnancy and parenting support in the weekly Sunday homily. This is often the best way to reach the largest number of parishioners. Speak with your pastor, priests, and deacons and ask them to consider highlighting the help available in their homilies. Emphasize that the entire homily does not need to be about a pro-life topic to include information on pregnancy support. For example, perhaps a homily's focus is on the works of mercy. The homilist could include information on your parish efforts to support pregnant and parenting women in need among a list of examples. Regular integration of the central message of *Walking with Moms in Need* can effectively educate parishioners and extend hope to those in need of assistance.

### Parish and Community Bulletin Boards

Physical bulletin boards are wonderful places to share pregnancy and parenting resource information and to highlight the efforts of your parish community. Work with your pastor and parish staff to regularly include flyers on bulletin boards and in other gathering areas. Share flyers with the parish support network for posting on community and public bulletin boards. Consider posting flyers with pull-off tabs with pregnancy and parenting resource information in areas that women can discreetly access this information, such as restrooms. Keep in mind that many women facing challenging pregnancies will want to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Posting flyers such as these allows them to seek help anonymously if they wish to.

### Social Media

Social media is a very powerful tool to communicate with parishioners, those in need of assistance, and your wider community. Many



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parishes have their own social media pages and platforms that they use to connect with parishioners. We encourage you to use these tools as part of *Walking with Moms* as well. Work with parish staff to create a calendar of regular postings related to local resources and your parish-based initiatives to help ensure pregnant and parenting women in need know that the Church is there for them. In addition to parish-based social media accounts, also encourage your core team and parish support network to share about your parish efforts on their personal social media accounts. Doing so provides a great opportunity to reach those in the larger community and might even inspire friends in other parts of the country to bring *Walking with Moms in Need* to their own parish.

### Parish Website

We encourage every parish to include information on their website about the pregnancy and parenting help available. Similar to the weekly bulletin, the parish website paints a picture of your particular parish community. Inclusion of this information demonstrates the parish's commitment to supporting pregnant and parenting women in need and ensures this information is readily available to those needing assistance. Remember that a woman facing an unexpected or challenging pregnancy may be afraid to reach out to the Church in a time of need, fearing that she will face judgment or stigmatization. Featuring help information on your website can help break down this barrier, extend compassion, and open the door for her to seek the help that is available.

### Partner Ministries

Whenever possible, work with partner ministries or organizations—whether they are part of your parish or the local community—to get the word out. Think about how these entities already advertise and look for opportunities to collaborate. For example, if you already have an established outreach committee at your parish, look for ways that they can promote the efforts your parish has undertaken in support of *Walking with Moms in Need* and ways that you can support the great

work that they do. Or, if you have formed a strong relationship with a local pregnancy center, you could ask them to promote and refer clients to your mothers' prayer or faith-sharing group. Further fostering these relationships and finding new ways to collaborate can help build a strong network of community support for women in need.

### Local Media

In order to reach your wider community, consider how you can engage with your local media outlets. Reach out to local news and community organizations with stories and information about how your parish is serving pregnant and parenting women in your community. Contact reporters, write letters to the editor, or reach out via social media. Often small, community-based papers and newsletters are where you can make the largest impact. (Additional tools for engaging local media are available [online](#).)



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### Paid Advertising

Depending on the plans your parish has undertaken and your particular community circumstances, there may be occasions when you will want to consider paid advertising. For example, your parish may determine that it is needed to help get the word out about a project, resource, or event—like fundraisers such as a festival, gala, or 5K race to get broader community support. If you do think this could be a good option, consider advertising in a local community paper, in regular diocesan papers or magazines, or on social media.



# PHASE 5

## Celebrate and Implement Parish Plans

During Phase 5 of *Walking with Moms in Need*, parishes will come together to celebrate all the great work already accomplished over the past year and the upcoming implementation of their plans to serve local moms in need. The core team, in collaboration with their pastor, will plan and host a parish-wide celebration to honor and celebrate the parish's progress. In addition to launching the parish response, the core team will also look ahead and consider ways to sustain and possibly expand their service to pregnant and parenting mothers.



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# SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps to guide you through Phase 5 of Walking with Moms in Need. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided materials to celebrate the close of the yearlong process and the launch of your plans for offering and communicating help to mothers in need.

## 1. Plan a parish-wide celebration.

Plan to host a parish-wide celebration to recognize your parish's progress in serving pregnant women in need through the *Walking with Moms* process. Ideas can range from hosting a "baby shower" for a local ministry to planning a gala event to support a new, parish-based initiative. Work with your pastor and core team to finalize the parish-wide celebration plans. (See "Hosting a Parish Celebration" on page 72 for ideas on how your parish can celebrate the fruits of *Walking with Moms in Need* and the gift of life.)

## 2. Celebrate your parish efforts to serve pregnant women in need, and the close of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of *Evangelium vitae*.

In collaboration with your pastor, share an encouraging update on parish plans with the broader parish community. Highlight the progress your parish has made in serving mothers in need through the *Walking with Moms in Need* process and all the ways your parish will continue reaching out to mothers in need. Invite all parishioners to a parish-wide celebration. Encourage your pastor, priests, and deacons to include this exciting news in their weekend homilies. (Sample announcements and homily notes are provided.)

## 3. Continue praying for pregnant mothers in need as a parish community.

When celebrating the progress on parish plans, use this opportunity to pray the "[Prayer for Pregnant Mothers](#)" together as a community and to encourage continued regular use of the prayer. Include intercessions for pregnant mothers and your parish efforts in the Prayer of the Faithful during Sunday Masses. (Sample intercessions are provided.)

## 4. Host the parish-wide celebration.

In collaboration with your pastor, use the celebration to share and recognize exciting updates with your parish community. Explain all the great work that has taken place over the past year and share all that the parish is currently working to accomplish. Continue to invite parishioner engagement and seek additional volunteers from the event attendees to help implement and sustain your parish efforts.

## 5. Continue the implementation of the parish plans.

Continue to engage the help of the core team, parish support network, and new volunteers in offering and communicating help to mothers in need. As you implement your plans, more ideas and opportunities may present themselves. Continue to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and how the Lord may want to continue building on and expanding the plans you have already committed to. (See "*Continuing to Walk with Moms in Need*" on page 75 for tips on sustaining and expanding your outreach in the months and years to come.)

# SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements can be used to celebrate the completion of the Walking with Moms in Need process and the launch of your plans to serve pregnant and parenting women needing assistance. These sample announcements can be used in the bulletin and can also be shared as pulpit announcements. Both a full-length and a condensed version are provided.

## FULL-LENGTH ANNOUNCEMENT (124 WORDS)

This past year our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. Our parish spent much of the last year taking inventory of pregnancy resources available in our local area, identifying gaps in services for mothers in need, and developing a parish-based response to these realities.

This month our parish will complete the initial *Walking with Moms* process, but our efforts to serve women facing a challenging pregnancy are just beginning. Please join us as we celebrate all the progress made throughout the last year, as well as the launch of our parish plans to walk with moms in need.

*Please join us!*

[Event Type or Title]

[Day of Week] [Date] [Time] [Location]

To learn more about the nationwide initiative, visit [www.walkingwithmoms.com](http://www.walkingwithmoms.com).

## CONDENSED ANNOUNCEMENT (106 WORDS)

This past year our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. This month our parish will complete the process of taking inventory of pregnancy resources available in our local area, identifying gaps in services for mothers in need, and developing a parish-based response to these realities.

But our efforts to serve women who are pregnant or parenting in difficult circumstances are just beginning. Please join us as we celebrate both the progress made throughout the past year and the launch of our parish plans to walk with moms in need.

*Please join us!*

[Event Type or Title]

[Day of Week] [Date] [Time] [Location]





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## SAMPLE INTERCESSIONS

*The following sample intercessions can be used to unite the entire parish in praying for pregnant and parenting women in need and for the success of your parish plans to serve them. These intercessions are appropriate for use in the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass, but can also be included in bulletins, newsletters, emails, and social media posts.*

For all pregnant and parenting mothers facing difficulties:

May God grant them the graces necessary to overcome any obstacle with the love, support, and assistance of the Body of Christ;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

As we begin to implement our plans to serve women in our community, may our parish's commitment to walk with moms in need remain steadfast and unwavering;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May all pregnant and parenting women in our community, especially those facing difficulties, know that they can turn to our parish for loving and life-affirming support;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

May our parish plans and efforts to serve mothers in need be constantly guided by the Holy Spirit and bear great fruit in our community;  
*We pray to the Lord:*

# HOMILY HELPS

*In addition to the homilist's reflections on the readings of the day, these brief homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons celebrate their parish efforts to walk with mothers in need. These notes are intended to highlight the parish accomplishments, announce the completion of the initial Walking with Moms in Need process, and launch the parish response.*

- Each year the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. This celebration commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. After giving her consent to God's word, Mary conceived Jesus in her womb and became the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God became incarnate in the womb of a woman as "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).
- In modern times, the feast of the Annunciation has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend human life from the first moment of existence. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. The Annunciation helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning in the womb. It calls us to reflect on how we are to care for, protect, and welcome new life, as the Blessed Mother did for the Christ child.
- In order to care for, protect, and welcome each new life in the mother's womb, we must first care for, support, and serve the mother, especially if she is facing difficulties or challenging circumstances. All mothers, like Our Blessed Mother, bear the miracle of new life into the world. In a special way, they are entrusted by God with the gift of life. It is the role of the Church to walk with all mothers, offering support, encouragement, and assistance as they seek to answer God's call in their lives.



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- This past year, our parish joined a nationwide effort entitled, ***Walking with Moms in Need***. Over the past several months, our parish prayerfully considered how we could increase our outreach to mothers in need. We took inventory of pregnancy resources in our local area, identified gaps in services, and developed plans to better serve women in our community who are pregnant or parenting in difficult circumstances.
- [Homilists are encouraged to share details, anecdotes, and specific examples of the work your parish has completed as part of *Walking with Moms in Need*. Explain the plans that your

parish has committed to and discuss how these plans have begun to be implemented.]

- [Homilists are encouraged to highlight that these important efforts to serve pregnant and parenting women are cause for *great celebration*. Invite the entire parish community to a parish-wide celebration to honor all that your parish has already accomplished. Share details about the form your parish celebration will take, and encourage parishioners to attend.]
- In *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II provided a clear challenge to us:

*With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth (EV 95).*

With this exhortation, we are called to assess our efforts in assisting pregnant and parenting moms in need and to improve our responses, where needed, especially at the local level.

- I am proud to say that through our participation in *Walking with Moms in Need*, our parish truly answered the call of Pope St. John Paul II. And while the initial process may be coming to a close, our efforts to support pregnant and parenting mothers are just *beginning*.
- When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she accepted the invitation to be the mother of God. Even though her unexpected pregnancy presented many challenges, she faithfully embraced God's plan for her life. And when Herod sought to take the life of the Christ child, Mary fled to Egypt with Joseph to protect and care for her son. Today, mothers who are pregnant or parenting young children in challenging circumstances can likely relate to the experience of our Blessed Mother as they,

too, often face difficulties in answering God's call to welcome and care for new life.

- We need to walk with women who are pregnant in difficult circumstances and help them answer this call to welcome and care for their children. Concerns about a lack of material and financial resources, as well as an absence of physical and emotional support can push women to believe that abortion is their only option. As Catholics, we know that abortion is never the answer for a woman in need. During challenging periods in our lives, we *all* need the care and support of others. For a pregnant or parenting woman in need, the real, tangible support of others can provide hope and help her see a way forward. Through the combined efforts of parishes throughout our diocese, we can help ensure that any pregnant or parenting woman in need can turn to the Church for compassionate, loving support and assistance.
- I am so excited to see the work and planning of the last year take shape in our parish as we implement our plans to better serve mothers in need. It is exciting to see what God is doing and will continue to do through our parish community. Please continue supporting these efforts with regular prayer. And I also want to take this opportunity to invite all of you to participate in implementing our parish plans. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide and bless our efforts as we launch our outreach to pregnant and parenting women needing assistance in our community.

*Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life)*, no. 95 © 1995, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. All rights reserved. Copyright © 2020, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.



# HOSTING A PARISH CELEBRATION

*All parishes are encouraged to host a parish-wide gathering to celebrate their accomplishments in support of Walking with Moms in Need. Ideas include celebrating a special Mass of thanksgiving with a reception following, hosting a “baby shower” for a local ministry, or planning a gala event to support a new, parish-based initiative. In collaboration with your pastor, use the event to celebrate with your parish community. Explain all the great work that has taken place over the past year and share all that the parish is currently working to accomplish. Continue to invite parishioner engagement and seek additional volunteers from the event attendees to help implement and sustain your parish efforts.*

## TYPES OF EVENTS

There are countless types of events that your parish can choose from to celebrate your efforts in support of *Walking with Moms in Need*. This is a great opportunity to really get creative and allow your celebration to reflect the unique personality of your parish community.

One simple option that could be adapted to any parish setting would be to offer a special liturgy—perhaps a Holy Hour and Mass—followed by a simple reception. Mass is the ultimate expression of thanksgiving and celebration. This format allows the entire parish community to join together, thanking God for all that has been accomplished thus far and praying for mothers in need, the successful implementation of your parish plans, and continued dedication of the parish community to supporting expectant and parenting mothers.

Your celebration could also be something simple and casual like a picnic or something more formal like a gala event. The plans that your parish has decided to undertake will also likely influence the shape of your celebration. For example, if you are launching a parish-based ministry to support your local pregnancy center, you might decide to host a “baby shower” to benefit the pregnancy center. Or, if your parish has joined with other local parishes or organizations to launch a maternity home, you might decide to host a gala dinner to help fundraise for this exciting new project. Work with your pastor to decide on what type of celebration would be best suited to your parish.



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## ELEMENTS TO INCORPORATE IN YOUR CELEBRATION

*No matter what type of event you ultimately choose, we encourage you to try and incorporate several of the following elements into your celebration, as appropriate:*

### Prayer

Prayer is the foundation of the entire *Walking with Moms* initiative. At the completion of this yearlong process, we encourage you to find ways to pray together as a parish community during your celebration. We should make it a priority to thank God for all the progress that the parish has made, ask His blessings on all the efforts to come, and continue to pray for pregnant and parenting mothers facing difficulties.

Consider different ways that you can include prayer in your celebration. In addition to opening and closing with prayer, perhaps you want to include a Rosary or guided meditation. Or, maybe you would like to precede your event with Mass, a Holy Hour, or even a Eucharistic Procession. Think about what is best suited to your specific celebration.

### Updates on Parish Efforts

Plan to include a brief update on all that your parish has accomplished and what your plans are going forward. If possible, it would be great for your pastor to provide this update. It is very likely that parishioners who are new to *Walking with Moms in Need* will join in this celebration. Use this opportunity to bring them up to date and refresh everyone else's memory.

### Education

If possible, try to integrate some educational elements into your celebration. While there is no need to plan a lecture or formal presentation, try to think of creative ways to increase parishioners' understanding of the need to support pregnant and parenting women. Consider sharing information that you learned through the inventory process about the needs of mothers in your community or the gaps in resources. Share key takeaways from the *Gospel of Life* and St. John Paul II's call for the Church to reach out to mothers in need. If you are hosting a gala event, this could be as simple as having a keynote speaker mention some of these themes in his or her address. Or, if you are offering a special liturgy, your pastor could include some of these elements into his homily.

### Expressions of Thanks

Consider a special way to thank your pastor, the core team, parish leaders, prayer team members, and any volunteers who have participated in *Walking with Moms in Need* for their work and dedication.

### Refreshments

No celebration is complete without refreshments. Plan to incorporate some sort of food and drink into your event. Depending on the type of event you are planning, you may want to provide a full meal, cake and punch, or snacks and finger foods. If you are concerned about supplying enough food for all in attendance, consider making it a potluck. The parish can provide something like burgers and hotdogs and ask each parish family to bring a dish to share. Think about creating a theme for your menu. Your parish could even get creative and encourage participation by making it a contest. For example, incorporate a chili cookoff, asking each parish family to provide a pot of chili or side to go with the theme.



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### Activities and Entertainment

Think about what types of activities or entertainment you might like to include as part of your event. If you choose to celebrate with a "baby shower," think of traditional baby shower games that could be adapted to a larger setting. Perhaps you would like to have live music during some portion of the celebration. If you decide to host a picnic, consider having outdoor games that families could



participate in like relay races, ring toss, or water balloons. Think about what your parish community would most enjoy and what would add to the celebratory tone of the event. Activities can provide additional ways for parishioners to interact and get to know one another.



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### Celebrate Life!

No matter what shape your celebration takes, make it a point to celebrate the gift of human life. While throughout *Walking with Moms in Need* you took time to really focus on the challenges and obstacles facing pregnant and parenting women in need, highlight the truth that life in all circumstances is good and deserves to be celebrated. The beauty and sacredness of human life underlies all the efforts in support of *Walking with Moms*. It is truly a gift from God. Use this event as an opportunity to celebrate this gift as a parish community.

### Invite Parishioner Involvement

Use this parish celebration to once again encourage increased parishioner involvement. Take a moment to explain the plans that are being implemented and where your greatest needs are, whether they be prayer, material, or volunteer support. Emphasize the role each parishioner plays in the success of your parish efforts. Have sign-up sheets available and continue to personally invite those in attendance to support your efforts. Remember that most people have to hear about something several times before they make a commitment to get involved.

## LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In planning your parish celebration, you'll want to make the same logistical considerations as you have in planning previous gatherings throughout *Walking with Moms in Need*. This is a great opportunity to put your experience to work once more. Revisit "Hosting a Meeting" on page 25 and "Hosting a Parish-Wide Meeting" on page 48 for general principles on scheduling, communication, preparation, and hospitality that apply to both large and small gatherings. Consider inviting your bishop or diocesan contact person to the celebration. While their busy schedules may prevent their participation, this is a good opportunity share with them what your parish is doing to support moms in need. As always, remember to work closely with your pastor and parish staff to plan this celebration.



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# CONTINUING TO WALK WITH MOMS IN NEED

As your parish works to implement its plans to serve pregnant and parenting women in need, additional ideas and opportunities will likely present themselves. We encourage you to continue being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and how the Lord may want you to continue building on and expanding the plans you have already committed to. While the initial Walking with Moms in Need process may have reached completion, your efforts to support mothers in your community are likely just beginning! The following sections provide suggestions for sustaining and even expanding your outreach to pregnant and parenting mothers in need in the months and years to come. It is essential that our efforts to provide assistance and support to mothers in need continue.



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## SUSTAINING YOUR PARISH EFFORTS

Throughout *Walking with Moms in Need*, your parish has done an incredible amount of work to raise awareness in your community about the needs of pregnant and parenting moms facing difficulties. You have gone to great lengths to assess the resources available in your local area and identify gaps and opportunities to increase outreach and support. *The impact of your efforts has the potential to be long-term, wide-ranging, and life-changing!* We encourage you to take steps to allow your work throughout the past year to bear as much fruit as possible. Even though the initial process may be reaching completion, in many ways your work is just getting started!

As you begin to implement your parish plans, it is important to think about ways to sustain your parish efforts as you move forward, especially once the initial momentum and excitement have worn off. Depending on what plans your parish has undertaken, your parish efforts may unfold in a series of steps and phases, and you will want to maintain wide parish support for your new initiatives. And even if your parish plans seem simple and straightforward, your goal should be to continue to cultivate a spirit of outreach and support in your parish for pregnant and parenting mothers. Our efforts to provide assistance and support to mothers in need should continue, even after the *Walking with Moms in Need* process has been completed.

### ***Establish Long-term Leadership***

For the fruits of *Walking with Moms in Need* to continue flourishing in the weeks, months, and even years to come, you will need to create a plan to address long-term leadership. We encourage you to transition key leaders from *Walking with Moms* into a permanent group, team, or committee that will continue addressing the needs of pregnant and parenting women in your community. While not all members of your core team will be able to commit to a long-term leadership role, many will still be able to continue

their service, bringing particular knowledge and experience to future plans and projects.

Transitioning into longer-term leadership roles can take many forms and will be heavily influenced by the initiatives your parish has undertaken. For example, if you have decided to launch a parish-based ministry, you will need a leadership team to head up those efforts. In this scenario, you could easily and organically transition your core team into this new ministry team. Or perhaps your parish has decided to incorporate pregnancy support into the efforts of an already-established outreach or service committee. In this case, the parish leader (or another member of the core team) for *Walking with Moms in Need* could be added to the outreach committee to coordinate specific efforts like a diaper drive or volunteer efforts at your local pregnancy center.

Transitioning into long-term leadership roles does not need to be complicated. No matter what efforts your parish has committed to, you will need to identify (a) leader(s) who will continue to carry the torch for mothers in need. Without a strong advocate, parish ministries and projects can easily stagnate and even disappear. It is important to have members of your parish who will continue to encourage parish outreach to pregnant and parenting mothers in need. As always, work closely with your pastor to determine the most appropriate means of transitioning leaders of *Walking with Moms* into more permanent leadership roles.



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### ***Sustain Your Parish Support Network***

In addition to creating a leadership plan for the future, you will also want to make plans to continue to engage with your parish support network. Your team has worked so hard to build this network, and it needs to continue to be nurtured. Continue to provide your support network with news and updates on the progress of your parish plans. Solicit prayers and volunteer support as needed. When applicable, continue encouraging your support network to greater involvement in your parish efforts to support mothers in need. Some parishes serve highly transitory populations, and families in the parish may come and go frequently. As

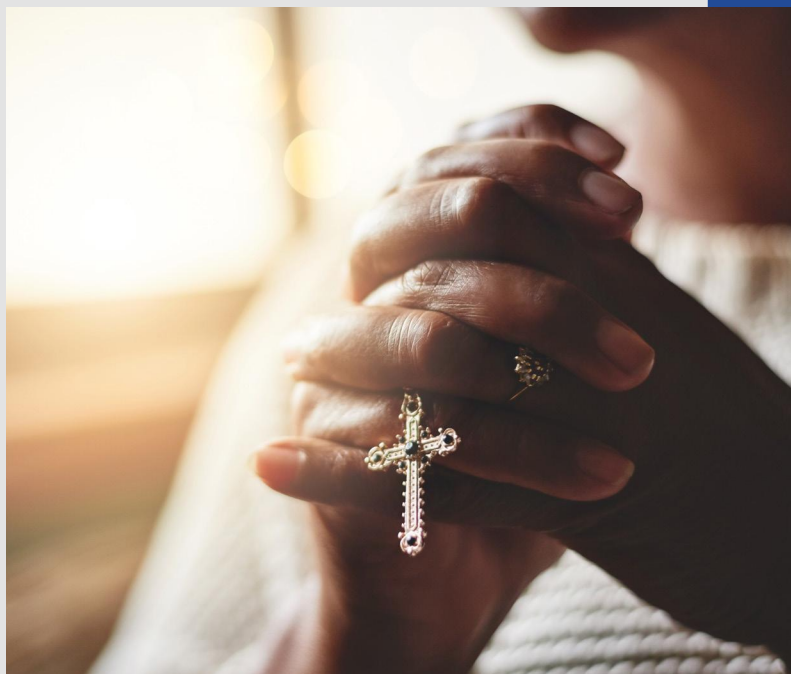
parishioners move away due to transitions in education or employment, you will need to be proactive about engaging new parishioners to sustain your support network.

While the ongoing cultivation of your parish network may look different based on your specific parish circumstances, it is important to take time to consider how you can continue to engage with these parishioners. If your parish has undertaken significant, multi-step efforts, you will likely need your parish support network to accomplish your goals. Even if your parish implementation process was accomplished very quickly, there may be opportunities in the future to expand your outreach efforts. If you fail to continue cultivating your support network, you may have to start from square one to support a new project or initiative.

## EXPANDING YOUR PARISH EFFORTS

When evaluating the particular resources and gaps in your community, your core team took time to consider various possible parish responses. You were encouraged to take into consideration the resources and capacities of your parish and the needs of your local community. As you brainstormed together, you likely came up with several possibilities. In collaboration with your pastor, you determined the plans and efforts that your parish would undertake at this specific time. During this process you were also encouraged to not set limits on what the Holy Spirit wanted to accomplish through your parish. It is very possible that in the future, your parish will want to expand or build on the initial plans it committed to.

There are many reasons why your parish may desire to expand your outreach efforts to mothers in need. Once you have accomplished your initial goals, your parish may be filled with excitement and the confidence to take on larger projects or expand on smaller efforts. As your parish continues to build relationships with other parishes or organizations, you may be presented with opportunities for collaboration and partnership that did not exist before. Perhaps your parish has received an increase in resources (volunteers with specific skills, additional funding, etc.) that inspires you to take on additional initiatives to serve pregnant and parenting moms in your community. Maybe a new need has arisen in your local area that your parish has the ability to help address. Or, perhaps your parish decided to start small with the hopes of ultimately expanding your outreach efforts, and you now feel able to do so.



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No matter your inspiration for expanding your parish efforts, remember to ask and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you. Even after the completion of the initial *Walking with Moms* process, plan to meet periodically with your pastor—perhaps every six months or once a year—to assess your current efforts. Discuss challenges and obstacles in implementing your plans, successes, opportunities, and any changes in the needs of the community. Use this time to consider additional or expanded projects. In collaboration with your pastor, discern what new efforts the Lord may be calling your parish to.

One simple way to expand your parish outreach is to look for new opportunities to build on your current efforts. Using this approach, you can take things step-by-step to organically increase your outreach. For example, maybe you committed to hosting a quarterly diaper or food drive to support your local pregnancy center or food bank. After successfully completing a number of drives, your parish may discern that it would also like to host an annual “baby shower” to support the local pregnancy center with additional essential items. Following a successful “baby shower,” you may then be inspired to launch a new parish-based ministry.

Keep in mind that every parish and diocese is unique, and that the Lord calls us all to serve in different



ways. Your parish may be ready to expand its efforts in a number of months in response to parish and community feedback. Or, it may be several years before your parish efforts grow past your initial plans. Remain confident that, no matter how big or small your efforts may seem, the Lord can use all of these to transform the lives of pregnant and parenting mothers in your community.

As your parish efforts to serve pregnant and parenting women grow and expand, continue to update your diocese. We encourage you to stay in touch with your Diocesan Contact Person and share your parish's plans, progress, and successes. Your Diocesan Contact Person can also be a great resource for ongoing support and assistance in overcoming obstacles and challenges your parish may encounter. They may be aware of parishes with similar situations and possible solutions. Take advantage of the knowledge and experience they may have to offer.



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