

*Moms* Walking with  
Moms in Need  
a year of service



# PARISH ACTION GUIDE



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**COMING SOON!**

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- PHASE 4:** Announce and Commit to Parish Response (January 2021)
- PHASE 5:** Celebrate and Implement Parish Plans (March 2021)

# INTRODUCTION

This Parish Action Guide is provided to assist parishes in joining the nationwide effort, ***Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service***, from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021. Inspired by St. John Paul II's call to assess our efforts in building a culture of life, the intention of the *Year of Service* 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 the *Year of Service*, 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 celebrates 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 this 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 from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021 entitled: “***Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service.***”

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 year of *Evangelium vitae* provides 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: A Year of Service* hopes to help parishes do just that.

For this *Year of Service*, 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 this *Year of Service* 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 *Year of Service* 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. This *Year of Service* 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: A Year of Service* is a yearlong initiative 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 timeline allots a year to complete this process from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021, but parishes can adjust this schedule as needed to account for local events, observances, or other schedule conflicts. The provided [Year At-a-Glance](#) table provides a simple overview of the process and proposed timeline.

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:** Announce *Year of Service* and Begin Building a Core Team (March 2020)
- **Phase 2:** Launch Parish Inventory Process (May 2020)
- **Phase 3:** Share Inventory Results and Begin Assessment and Planning (September 2020)
- **Phase 4:** Announce and Commit to Parish Response (January 2021)
- **Phase 5:** Celebrate and Implement Parish Plans (March 2021)

This Action Guide provides all necessary instructions and resources for Phases 1 and 2. Detailed instructions and materials for the remaining Phases 3-5 will be sent out and posted online at a later date. The included Action Guide for Phases 1-2 will allow parishes to be able to begin the *Year of Service* in March 2020 and carry them through until August 2020.

Be sure to subscribe to our [email list](#) to make sure you receive all news, updates, and supplemental materials for the *Year of Service*.

*Walking with Moms in Need: Year At-a-Glance*

1/27/20

Month	Events	Parish Action	Notes and Resources
<b>2020</b> January	<i>9 Days for Life</i> Novena & <i>Roe</i> Anniversary (1/22)		Usual <i>9 Days for Life</i> Novena (1/21 to 1/29) Year of Service Pledge at the end of Novena
February	Ash Wednesday (2/26)		Prayer Cards available to order. Parish Action Guide (online 2/7): Timeline, announcements, homily helps, suggested prayers, and activities. Pastor invitations to parish leaders.
March	Annunciation/Incarnation & <i>Evangelium Vitae</i> 25 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary (3/25)	Parish Action Phase 1: Announce <i>Year of Service</i> (3/22 & 3/29) and Begin Building a Core Team	Announce <i>EV</i> Anniversary: <i>EV</i> call to action to help moms in need. Announce <i>Year of Service</i> : Overview of year and parish participation.
April	Easter (4/12) Divine Mercy (4/19)		
May	Mother's Day (5/10)	Parish Action Phase 2: Launch Parish Inventory Process (5/10)	Mother's Day focus on moms in need: Prayers, homily helps. Announce Parish Inventory: Invite parishioner engagement with personal asks and announcements. Launch inventory process.
June		Launch Parish Inventory	Parish volunteers take inventory of local resources for pregnant moms in need.
July			Parish volunteers take inventory of local resources for pregnant moms in need.
August			Parish volunteers take inventory of local resources for pregnant moms in need.
September		Parish Action Phase 3: Share Inventory Results (9/13 & 9/20) and Begin Assessment and Planning	Announce inventory results. Invite parishioner engagement in assessment of findings and deciding next steps: Personal asks, announcements, and parish-wide meeting.
October	Respect Life Month	Assess Findings, Study Models, Plan Response	Parish assessment and planning: Consider various possible parish responses and sample models for offering and communicating help to moms in need.
November			Parish assessment and planning: Consider various parish responses and sample models for offering and communicating help to moms in need.
December	Advent/Christmas		Parish assessment and planning: Finalize parish plans for offering and communicating help to moms in need.
<b>2021</b> January	<i>9 Days for Life</i> Novena & <i>Roe</i> Anniversary (1-22)	Parish Action Phase 4: Announce and Commit to Parish Response (1/10 & 1/17)	Usual <i>9 Days for Life</i> Novena Announce Parish Plans: Homily helps, announcements. Invite parishioner engagement in plans. Parish-wide meeting.
February	Ash Wednesday (2-17)		Invite parishioner engagement in plans: Personal asks, announcements, gatherings, trainings.
March	Annunciation/Incarnation & <i>Evangelium Vitae</i> 26 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary (3-25)	Parish Action Phase 5: Celebrate and Implement Parish Plans (3/14 & 3/21)	Celebration and reminder of Parish Plans: Homily helps, announcements. Invite parishioner engagement. Parish-wide meeting.
April	Easter (4-4) Divine Mercy (4-11)	Beginning Steps in New Parish Efforts	Ongoing parish activities subject to level of parish commitment.

  = Months in which Lent falls

March 2020

# PHASE 1

## Announce *Year of Service* 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 will also celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*, highlighting its call to serve pregnant and parenting moms in need. The anniversary will serve as an appropriate time to announce the parish's participation in the nationwide effort, *Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service*.



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# SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps to guide you through Phase 1 of Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service. 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 the *Year of Service*. 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 *Year of Service* 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 the *Year of Service* 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 the *Year of Service*. 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 *Year of Service*. See “Creating a Parish Support Network” on page 18 for tips on establishing this network of wider support.

## 4. Announce the *Evangelium vitae* anniversary and *Year of Service*.

On the weekends of March 21-22 and/or 28-29 use the provided sample announcements to share the *Evangelium vitae* anniversary and *Year of Service* with your parish community. Encourage your pastor, priests, and deacons to include this exciting news in their weekend homily using the provided “Homily Helps.”

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

When announcing the *Year of Service*, 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 to pray for the *Year of Service* within 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: A Year of Service to your parish community. These can be used in the bulletin and can also be shared as pulpit announcements. Pre-designed inserts of these announcements are also available for download and inclusion in your bulletin. Both a [full-length](#) and [condensed](#) version are provided. The suggested dates of use are the weekends of March 21-22 and 28-29.

## FULL-LENGTH ANNOUNCEMENT (186 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.

Beginning March 25, 2020, the Church will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the prophetic 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.

This anniversary year gives us a wonderful opportunity to assess, expand, and better communicate resources to pregnant moms and families in need at the local level. Our parish is joining a nationwide effort from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021 entitled: “*Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service*.”

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

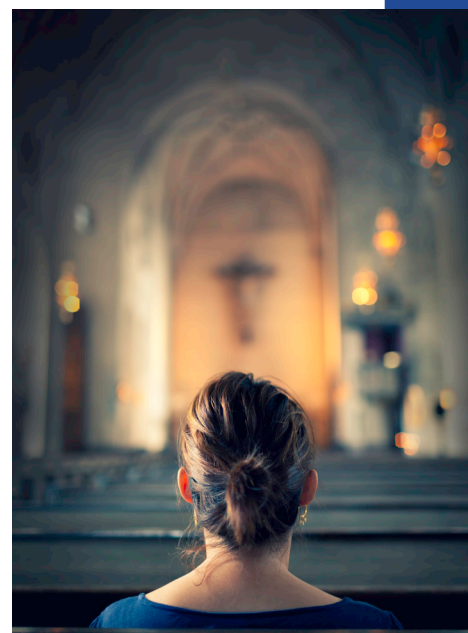
To learn more about the nationwide initiative, visit [www.walkingwithmoms.com](http://www.walkingwithmoms.com).

## CONDENSED ANNOUNCEMENT (122 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.

In order to assess, expand, and better communicate resources to local pregnant moms and families in need, our parish is joining a nationwide effort from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021 entitled: “*Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service*.”

We invite all parishioners to join us as we embark on this *Year of Service*. 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 a *Year of Service* to 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

*These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons incorporate the Year of Service into their weekly homily, in addition to reflections on the readings of the day. These notes are intended to help educate the parish community, announce participation in the Year of Service, and inspire parishioners to reach out to mothers in need. Because the Solemnity of the Annunciation falls midweek, the suggested dates of use for these notes are the weekends of March 21-22 or 28-29.*

- On March 25, 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 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.

- This year’s celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation coincides with the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 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 honor of this anniversary year of *The Gospel of Life*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has invited us to join a nationwide effort from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021 entitled, “***Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service.***” During this *Year of Service* our parish is asked to prayerfully consider how we can increase our outreach to mothers in need. 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.

- We are excited to embark on this *Year of Service*, 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: A Year of Service. [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 Year of Service.

## 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 during the *Year of Service*, encouraging the parish to pray together at home for mothers in need.
- During the weekend in which the *Year of Service* is announced, 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 throughout the *Year of Service*.
- 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” during the *Year of Service*.
- Include the “Prayer for Pregnant Mothers” in newsletters, prayer chains, emails and on social media.

\*Cf. *Evangelium vitae* 105 © Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City. Adapted with permission. All rights reserved. Copyright © 2019, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.

# SELECTING A PARISH LEADER *(for pastors)*

*Pastors are asked to appoint a parish leader as the main point person and coordinator of the Year of Service. 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 the *Year of Service*.



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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 THE YEAR OF SERVICE 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 the *Year of Service* is not political or policy driven. Although these efforts are very important and commendable (and part of the bishops' [Pastoral Plan](#)), the *Year of Service* is focused on providing real, tangible support to pregnant women in need. Part of the vision for this initiative 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 the *Year of Service*—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 *Year of Service* 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 March 25, 2020 - March 25, 2021 timeframe. *Do the candidates you are considering have the bandwidth and desire to continue to shepherd this pastoral initiative beyond March 25, 2021?*

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 past the *Year of Service* itself.

## 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 the *Year of Service* 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 Year of Service 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 the Year of Service and act as ambassadors of the initiative in the parish. While the entire parish community is invited and encouraged to participate in Walking with Moms in Need, 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 larger 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 the *Year of Service* 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 beginning a broader parish support network. Not everyone interested in assisting in the Year of Service 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 Year of Service, 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 throughout the Year of Service. 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 announcement about the *Year of Service*, 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 the *Year of Service*, 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 the *Year of Service* 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.

May 2020

# 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 utilizes Mother's Day (or another weekend in May) to once again pray for pregnant women in need. This is another opportunity to remind the parish community about the *Year of Service*, continue to answer questions, and encourage parishioners to get involved.

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# SIMPLE STEPS

*Here is a list of simple steps to guide you through Phase 2 of Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service. These steps offer ideas 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. Celebrate Mother’s Day with the Year of Service.

While not a Catholic or liturgical observance, Mother’s Day is an appropriate opportunity to continue to pray for mothers in need. Consider using the sample intercessions to pray for pregnant women in the Prayer of the Faithful. We also suggest utilizing this holiday (or another weekend in May) to announce the start of the inventory process in your parish community. 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. You will be provided with an inventory form that you can 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: A Year of Service and announce the launch of the parish inventory process. These can be used in the bulletin and can also be shared as pulpit announcements. Pre-designed inserts of these announcements are also available for download and inclusion in your bulletin. Both a [full-length](#) and [condensed](#) version are provided. The suggested date of use is Mother's Day weekend, May 9-10.

## FULL-LENGTH ANNOUNCEMENT (185 WORDS)

In March our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, *Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service*. 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.

As we celebrate Mother's Day, we thank God for the gift of mothers who continually sacrifice of themselves and pray that our efforts will help ensure pregnant women in need know that they can turn to our parish for support and assistance.

This month members of our parish community will begin the inventory process. Please keep them in your prayers as they begin the initial steps of this *Year of Service*. Once completed, the results of their inventory will be shared with the parish community.

We invite all parishioners to join with us during the *Year of Service*. 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 (126 WORDS)

In March our parish joined a nationwide effort to increase outreach and support for pregnant and parenting mothers entitled, *Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service*. As we celebrate Mother's Day, we thank God for the gift of mothers who continually sacrifice of themselves and pray that our efforts will help ensure pregnant women in need know that they can turn to our parish for support and assistance.

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.

We invite all parishioners to join with us during the *Year of Service*. 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 on this Mother's Day weekend,  
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 the celebration of Mother's Day  
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 the Year of Service into their Sunday homily. These notes are intended to help educate the parish, remind the community about the Year of Service, and inspire parishioners to reach out to mothers in need. The suggested date of use for these notes is Mother's Day weekend, May 9-10.*

- Mother's Day is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the vocation of motherhood and the gift of life entrusted to mothers by God in a very special way. While Mother's Day is not a liturgical or Catholic observance, many parishes still take advantage of this holiday to honor and pray for mothers. It is a fitting day to ask God's special blessing on those who bring forth and nurture human life, especially those facing difficulties and challenging circumstances.
- In our efforts to honor and offer thanksgiving for all mothers, it is also important to remember that Mother's Day can be a difficult holiday for many people, such as women who are struggling with infertility, those who have lost or are estranged from their mothers, and mothers who have lost one or more children through miscarriage, abortion, or some other way. During your homily, you may want to take a moment to acknowledge that this is difficult day for many. This simple gesture can communicate a sense of understanding and recognition for what they are going through. The fact that this observance can be particularly painful for so many gives witness to the very important role that mothers play in all our lives.
- 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 the *Year of Service* 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. The *Year of Service* 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 © 2019, 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 for the Year of Service, consider hosting a sign-up Sunday. This is a great way to share information about the Year of Service 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: A Year of Service* 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 *Year of Service* and sign-up to support this important initiative in our parish. [pre-designed bulletin insert]

## 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 the *Year of Service*. 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 the member of a 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 Year of Service. 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 or days of the week that work well for your team members and reservations for parish meeting space.

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.

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



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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 during the *Year of Service*.

# COMPLETING THE PARISH INVENTORY

*The Year of Service 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. With the help of your core team, we suggest trying to complete the inventory by August 2020. The following instructions are provided to help you 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. 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 the *Year of Service* 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. 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 the *Year of Service* 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 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.

## THANK YOU! AND NEXT STEPS:

*Thank you for investing the effort to walk in the shoes of a pregnant woman in need, and for documenting the local services that are currently available. Your early reflections on what resources may still be needed and your ideas for better communicating to moms in need will be of great assistance to the parish's efforts in the fall. In September, the findings will be shared with the broader parish community, which lays the foundation for Phase 3: "Share Inventory Results and Begin Assessment and Planning."*



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