

ACTION GUIDE

SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD
25TH ANNIVERSARY OF *EVANGELIUM VITAE*:
MARCH 25, 2020

INTRODUCTION

The celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord 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 conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman, and "*the Word became flesh*" (John 1:14).

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in Respect Life ministry. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. 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 2020, the Solemnity of the Annunciation also coincides with the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*). This Church teaching on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth for all people. Written by Pope St. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* was appropriately given in Rome on March 25, 1995.

The encyclical highlights the importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Annunciation of the Lord in the Church's efforts to promote and defend human life:

The angel's Annunciation to Mary is framed by these reassuring words: "Do not be afraid, Mary" and "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother's life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care.... Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated.¹

To help you celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation and *Evangelium vitae*'s 25th anniversary, sample timelines, homily helps, announcements, activities, and more are provided. You are encouraged to adapt these resources as needed to fit your specific parish, school, or ministry. Free downloads and electronic resources can be found at respectlifeprogram.org/march.

Free downloads and additional electronic resources can be found at respectlifeprogram.org/march.

SIMPLE STEPS

Here is a list of simple steps that you can use in your parish, school, ministry, or home to help in your efforts to celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation and the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*. These steps offer ideas on how to use the provided resources. Each step may not apply to your specific circumstance, but most can be adapted to suit your needs.

1. Prepare through prayer.

The USCCB offers a novena in honor of the Annunciation called “A Heart Open to God’s Will.” In 2020, this novena will be prayed from March 16 – 24. Invite your parish to join in praying this novena. Highlight the novena in your bulletin on the weekends of March 7-8 and 14-15. Be sure to make copies of the novena available in a prominent place in your parish on the weekends that the novena announcement appears. (Visit respectlifeprogram.org/march to order or download copies of the novena.)

2. Reach out to parents expecting a child.

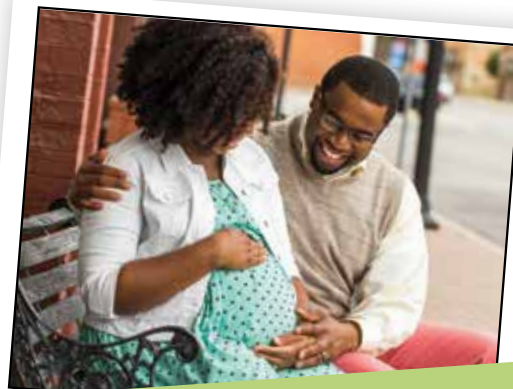
In honor of the Annunciation, ask your pastor to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. Propose the possibility of including this blessing as part of the weekend Masses March 21-22, as not all parishioners will be able to attend Mass on the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Your pastor may prefer to offer the blessing at another time. Once a date and time have been set, invite expectant parents to participate by announcing the blessing from the pulpit and/or including an invitation in the bulletin.

3. Educate and celebrate.

Sample bulletin inserts will be made available to help educate your faith community about *Evangelium vitae* and to help celebrate its 25th anniversary. Homily helps are also provided if your priest would like to highlight the anniversary of this important document in his homily. More resources will be made available online at respectlifeprogram.org/gospel-of-life.

4. Pray for expectant parents and unborn children.

Sample intercessions are provided for use during the Prayer of the Faithful during Masses on the weekend of March 21-22 and on March 25. Schools can use these intercessions to mark the Solemnity of the Annunciation by praying together at the beginning of class. Families can include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning, evening, or before or after a family meal.



We would love to see how your parish, school, or ministry observed the Solemnity of Annunciation and the anniversary of the Gospel of Life!

Show us how you celebrated by emailing prolife@usccb.org or tag us on Facebook (@peopleoflife) or Twitter (@usccbprolife).

SAMPLE TIMELINE

We have provided a sample timeline* to help you celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation and the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*. While these steps apply most directly to a parish coordinator, they can be adapted to help you think about key steps you can take to plan ahead in whatever capacity you serve the Church. More resources are available online to help you celebrate the anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*: respectlifeprogram.org/march.

*Because this observance falls near the Sunday of Divine Mercy, the provided sample timelines may overlap. Consider combining tasks; for example, maybe it would be helpful to discuss plans for the Annunciation and the Sunday of Divine Mercy with your pastor during a single meeting. Or, he may prefer separate meetings. Ask what you can do to make the most of your time together. Keep these overlapping timelines in mind when you work with other parish staff and volunteers.

NOVEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Monday, November 11, 2019

Request an early-December appointment with your pastor to discuss celebrations for the Annunciation and the 25th anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*. Keep in mind that Advent can be a busy time for parishes, and your pastor may need to push your meeting until after Christmas.

In the meantime, visit respectlifeprogram.org/march to review and familiarize yourself with all the resources and materials available to help you celebrate the Annunciation and *Evangelium vitae*'s 25th anniversary. (More action ideas and resources for this celebration will be provided online than are included in this specific action guide.) Download any resources you hope to use during the month of March. This would include bulletin announcements, intercessions, homily notes, the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* and the Annunciation novena, "A Heart Open to God's Will."

DECEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Early December 2019

- ◆ Meet with your pastor, and remind him about the upcoming celebration of the Annunciation and share that it also coincides with the 25th anniversary of *The Gospel of Life*. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes, prayer intercessions, and the novena. Ask what your parish might do to observe these important celebrations this year. Most importantly, *ask what you can do to help*. Perhaps emailing him the homily notes directly will save him time. Or, he may ask if you can send the prayer intercessions to another parish staff member. If you have any bulletin submissions planned or have any special activities in mind, be sure to share this information as well. Keep in mind that these observances fall during Lent, which is often a busy time for parishes and priests.
- ◆ Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Share the results of that conversation and what you are requesting to help celebrate the Annunciation of the Lord. Ask about bulletin submission policies. Many parishes need content several weeks in advance to be able to include it in the weekly bulletin. Inquire about deadlines and share what content you hope to have featured.

This will help your parish plan ahead and allot the necessary space in the bulletin. Lent often requires additional bulletin space for special announcements. Contact your parish while there may still be space available. Again, most importantly, *ask what you can do to help*.

JANUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Early January 2020

Following the Christmas and New Year holidays, reconnect with appropriate parish staff and touch base with your pastor to offer further assistance and confirm any plans you may have made. This is the time to determine if there are any follow-up tasks to be completed in the weeks ahead of March 25.

If your parish is planning to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, be sure to download and/or order a copy for your parish.

Monday, January 13, 2020

Complete all bulletin submissions for the month of March. This includes the bulletin announcements for the novena in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation, information on 25th anniversary of *The Gospel of Life*, and invitations for parishioners to receive the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. Begin highlighting these celebrations on bulletin boards, in newsletters, and on social media.

FEBRUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

Tuesday, February 4, 2020

Reconnect with appropriate parish staff regarding your bulletin submissions. This is the time to tie up any loose ends and verify that all content has been received by those who need it. If you ordered a copy of the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* for your pastor, check to make sure he has received it. Having these tasks completed before the start of Lent will allow you to enter more deeply into this sacred liturgical season of prayer, penance, and almsgiving.

Wednesday, February 26: Ash Wednesday
(Lent begins.)

MARCH

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Monday, March 16, 2020

Begin praying the Annunciation novena, "A Heart Open to God's Will" individually or in union with your parish, school, or ministry community. Consider sharing parts of the novena on social media each day, encouraging others to join in. Ask that the Solemnity of the Annunciation would touch hearts and open eyes to the gift of every human life.

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Touch base with your pastor and/or appropriate parish staff one last time to make sure everything is in order. Be sure your pastor has copies of the homily notes, intercessions, and the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*, if desired. You may be asked to share copies of these with a deacon or sacristan who helps in preparations for the Sunday Mass.

Wednesday, March 25: Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord and the 25th anniversary of Evangelium vitae



BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annunciation Novena

(Suggested Weekends: March 7-8 & 14-15, 2020)

◆ Option 1

Join us in praying a special novena March 16-24 in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on March 25. The Annunciation 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 becomes the mother of God. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena can be picked up in the [insert location].

◆ Option 2

Join us in praying a special novena March 16-24 in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena can be picked up in the [insert location].

Blessing of a Child in the Womb

(Suggested Weekend: March 14-15, 2020)

◆ Option 1

Expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their unborn children in celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The blessing will be offered during all Masses next weekend, March 22-23.

◆ Option 2

Next weekend, during all Masses on March 22 & 23, expectant parents are invited to join us for a blessing of their children in the womb.

25th Anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*

(Suggested Weekend: March 21-22, 2020)

◆ Option 1

Did You Know? This Wednesday, March 25, is the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord and marks the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*), written by

Pope St. John Paul II. This document on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth for all people. It reaffirms the "greatness and the inestimable value of human life" (EV 2), and addresses present-day legal, ethical, and moral threats to life, including abortion, artificial reproduction techniques, contraception, capital punishment, euthanasia, sterilization, and suicide. More information:

respectlifeprogram.org/gospel-of-life. (Excerpt from *Evangelium vitae* © 1995, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. All rights reserved.)

◆ Option 2

Did You Know? This Wednesday, March 25, is the Solemnity of the Annunciation and marks the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*), written by Pope St. John Paul II. This document on the value and inviolability of every human life remains an indispensable source of truth for all people. More information: respectlifeprogram.org/gospel-of-life.

PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annunciation Novena

(Suggested Weekends: March 7-8 & 14-15, 2020)

◆ Option 1

You're invited to join us in a special novena from March 16th through the 24th in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The Annunciation commemorates the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary to inform her that she was to be the mother of our Savior. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena will be available in the [insert location] after Mass.

◆ Option 2

Join us in a special novena from March 16th through the 24th in preparation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation. Let us follow the example of Mary and call upon her intercession to help us open our hearts to say "yes" to God! Copies of the novena will be available in the [insert location] after Mass.



Blessing of a Child in the Womb

(Suggested Weekend: March 14-15, 2020)

◆ Option 1

Expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their unborn children in celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation. The blessing will be offered during all Masses next weekend, March 22-23.

◆ Option 2

Next weekend, expectant parents are invited to receive a special blessing for their child in the womb. The blessing will be offered during all weekend Masses.



► INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use during the month of March in honor of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord; however, many can be used throughout the year. These intentions are appropriate for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday Mass.

They can also be printed in the weekly bulletin, included at a local pro-life march or rally, featured in email newsletters, shared on social media platforms, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

For all expectant mothers:
That the miracle of new life silently growing in their womb
will strengthen in them a commitment to cherish all human life;

We pray to the Lord:

For parents facing an unexpected pregnancy:
That they may lovingly accept the precious life God has entrusted to their care;

We pray to the Lord:

For married couples longing for a child:
That through the intercession of the Blessed Mother,
they may be given the grace to trust in God's loving plan for their family;

We pray to the Lord:

For those considering adoption:
May the Holy Spirit guide their discernment,
and grant them the grace to say "yes" to God's holy will;

We pray to the Lord:

For those suffering the loss of a child:
May they find healing and peace in Christ's promise of everlasting life;

We pray to the Lord:

For all Catholics:
May the incarnation of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary strengthen us in protecting God's gift of life;

We pray to the Lord:

HOMILY HELPS

These homily notes are provided to help priests and deacons make connections to respect for all human life on the Solemnity of the Annunciation (March 25). Parts of these reflections on the Annunciation can also be included in the homily the weekend prior (March 21-22) to inform the parish community about this upcoming feast day. Brief notes are provided to introduce the congregation to the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*.

Other ministry leaders can also use these reflections to highlight Respect Life connections elsewhere, such as in a Bible study, in a small group or a faith formation setting, or as part of any other ministry gathering.

Sunday, March 22, 2020 | Fourth Sunday of Lent

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14
Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12
Gospel: John 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

This upcoming Wednesday, 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 conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. God becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14).

In modern times, this feast day 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 anticipation of this great Marian feast day that highlights the humanity of all unborn children, we will be offering the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb*. All expectant parents will be invited to rise, come forward, and receive this blessing upon their children.

[The Blessing of a Child in the Womb may take place within Mass (after the Prayer of the Faithful), or as an additional solemn blessing at the end of Mass. It may also be given outside the Mass, within the context of a brief celebration of the Word of God, by a priest or deacon.]

Wednesday, March 25, 2020 | Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord (25th Anniversary of *Evangelium vitae*)

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11
Second Reading: Hebrews 10:4-10
Gospel Acclamation: John 1:14ab
Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

The following sample homily is based on the reflections of Pope St. John Paul II in the conclusion of the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, nos. 102-105.

Today is the 25th 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. It also addressed modern day threats to life, including abortion, artificial reproduction, contraception, capital punishment, euthanasia, sterilization, and suicide.

Issued 25 years ago today, *The Gospel of Life* was prophetically put forward on this great Marian feast, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. Today's celebration of the Annunciation—as recalled in our Gospel reading—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 conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ becomes incarnate in the womb of a woman and the Word is made flesh.

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in the Church's efforts to protect and defend human life. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. 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 the conclusion of *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II offers a profound reflection on Mary, the Mother of God and the Annunciation. This homily is based largely on these reflections.

In the story of the Annunciation we see that “the one who accepted ‘Life’ in the name of all and for the sake of all was *Mary*, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the *Gospel of life*. Mary’s consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity.”²

Mary, in becoming the Mother of God, becomes the “mother of all who are reborn to life.”³ In a similar way, we also understand the Church to be our mother. By contemplating Mary’s motherhood, the Church “discovers the meaning of her own motherhood.”⁴ Mary’s experience as the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, gives us the “model of how life should be welcomed and cared for.”⁵

Like Mary, pregnant with the Christ-child, the Church “bears within herself the Savior of the world.”⁶ The Church “is called to offer Christ to the world, giving men and women new birth into God’s own life.”⁷ But this great mission of the Church was only made possible by the motherhood of Mary, who bore Christ to the world through her very womb. Mary is therefore the model of the Church.

The motherhood of the Church is only realized through the labor pains of childbirth, meaning that the Church is “in constant tension with the forces of evil”⁸ and performs her saving mission amid sin, suffering, injustice, and death. But, “like the Church, Mary too had to live her motherhood amid suffering.”⁹ Her own heart

was pierced. Mary’s “‘yes’ spoken on the day of the Annunciation reaches full maturity on the day of the Cross,”¹⁰ when Mary gives her Son over to death, and becomes the Mother of the Church.

We know that the life of the Christ-child was threatened long before Calvary. Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt to protect the life of the infant Jesus from Herod’s plans to kill him. Mary “helps the Church to realize that life is always at the center of a great struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness.”¹¹ The vulnerable infant Jesus represents “every person, every child, especially every helpless baby whose life is threatened.”¹² Because Christ in taking on flesh has united Himself with every human person, we come to understand that “rejection of human life, in whatever form that rejection takes, is really a rejection of Christ”¹⁵ himself.

Despite the great number of threats to human life in our world today, we still have hope. St. John Paul II highlights the angel’s announcement to Mary, which “is framed by these reassuring words: ‘Do not be afraid, Mary’ and ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ (Lk 1:30, 37). The whole of the Virgin Mother’s life is in fact pervaded by the certainty that God is near to her and that he accompanies her with his providential care.”¹⁴ Therefore, “*Mary is a living word of comfort for the Church* [emphasis added] in her struggle against death. Showing us the Son, the Church assures us that in him the forces of death have already been defeated.”¹⁵ The battle for life has already been won. By his blood, Christ has won salvation for us.

So, we must look to Mary and entrust the cause of life to her tender care and intercession. We are called to be a people of life and for life. We ask that the Blessed Mother would “grant that all who believe in your Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love to the people of our time.”¹⁶

May we answer St. John Paul II’s “pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: *respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life!*” [emphasis added].¹⁷



1 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 105.

2 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 102.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 103

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 104

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 105.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

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

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SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Blessing of a Child in the Womb

The Solemnity of the Annunciation is a perfect occasion to offer the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* to expectant parents in your parish community. The celebration of the Annunciation 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 conceives Jesus in her womb and becomes the mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In modern times, this feast day has taken on special meaning in Respect Life ministry. Scientific advances have allowed us to confirm that life begins at conception. This solemnity helps us to recognize the gift of new life from its very beginning. 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.

Because the solemnity falls on a Wednesday, we recommend that parishes offer this blessing during Sunday Masses the weekend prior in anticipation of this important feast of the Church.

This blessing may take place within Mass (after the Prayer of the Faithful), as an additional solemn blessing at the end of Mass, or within the context of a brief celebration of the Word of God, by a priest or deacon.

You can order a copy of the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in Womb* from our catalog or at store.usccb.org. A free downloadable PDF version and supplemental information can also be found online:

respectlifeprogram.org/blessing-in-womb.

Materials

- ◆ Copy of the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in Womb*

Directions

1. Contact your pastor, and ask if he would consider offering the *Blessing of a Child in the Womb* for expectant parents near the Solemnity of the Annunciation. We recommend including it within the Sunday Masses on the weekend of March 21-22 in anticipation of the solemnity. This allows the greatest number of parishioners to participate and highlights the humanity of all unborn children. You could also consider suggesting just one Mass at which to offer the blessing. However, your pastor may have reasons to offer the blessing at another time to best suit the needs of your particular community.
2. If you pastor agrees to offer the blessing, ask whether he needs you to order or download a copy of the Rite of Blessing. Make sure that he receives the materials well in advance. Perhaps he would appreciate you downloading and sending him the PDF version while he waits for the booklet to be delivered.
3. Once a date and time for the blessing have been confirmed, plan to announce the opportunity to receive the blessing to parishioners one to two weeks in advance. Use the sample announcements to include an invitation in the bulletin and share it in any announcements before or after Mass. If your parish utilizes any social media platforms, share the news on any relevant social media accounts.
4. You may want to consider providing an email address or phone number for RSVPs, so you have some sense for parishioner participation (especially in parishes without many expectant parents). If the blessing will be offered at multiple Masses, consider asking expectant parents who would like to receive the blessing to let you know which Mass they plan to attend.
5. During the week in which the blessing is planned, touch base with your pastor once more. *Ask if there is anything you can do to help.*

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