

REVIEWING AND ASSESSING INVENTORY RESULTS

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

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

EVALUATING RESOURCES AND ORGANIZATIONS

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

Compatibility with Church Teaching

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

3 *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

Overall Helpfulness and Reliability

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

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

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



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IDENTIFYING GAPS IN RESOURCES

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

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

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

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

ASSESSING CURRENT COMMUNICATIONS REALITIES

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

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



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

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

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

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

COMPILING AN OVERVIEW

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

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

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



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