

# COMMITTING TO AND IMPLEMENTING A PARISH RESPONSE

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

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

## HOSTING THE PARISH-WIDE MEETING

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



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

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

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

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

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



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## INVITING BROADER PARISH INVOLVEMENT

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

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

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

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



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

## BEGINNING THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

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

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