

COMMUNICATING HELP FOR MOTHERS IN NEED

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



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BEST PRACTICES

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

Audience

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

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

Message

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

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

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

Tone

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

Method

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

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

GETTING THE WORD OUT

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

Weekly Bulletin

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

Pulpit Announcements

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

Weekly Homily

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

Parish and Community Bulletin Boards

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

Social Media

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



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

Parish Website

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

Partner Ministries

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

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

Local Media

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



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Paid Advertising

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