

HOSTING A PARISH CELEBRATION

All parishes are encouraged to host a parish-wide gathering to celebrate their accomplishments over the past year and to close out the Year of Service. Ideas include celebrating a special Mass of thanksgiving with a reception following, hosting a “baby shower” for a local ministry, or planning a gala event to support a new, parish-based initiative. In collaboration with your pastor, use the event to celebrate with your parish community. Explain all the great work that has taken place over the past year and share all that the parish is currently working to accomplish. Continue to invite parishioner engagement and seek additional volunteers from the event attendees to help implement and sustain your parish efforts.

TYPES OF EVENTS

There are countless types of events that your parish can choose from to celebrate your efforts at the close of the *Year of Service*. This is a great opportunity to really get creative and allow your celebration to reflect the unique personality of your parish community.

One simple option that could be adapted to any parish setting would be to offer a special liturgy—perhaps a Holy Hour and Mass—followed by a simple reception. Mass is the ultimate expression of thanksgiving and celebration. This format allows the entire parish community to join together, thanking God for all that has been accomplished thus far and praying for mothers in need, the successful implementation of your parish plans, and continued dedication of the parish community to supporting expectant and parenting mothers.

Your celebration could also be something simple and casual like a picnic or something more formal like a gala event. The plans that your parish has decided to undertake will also likely influence the shape of your celebration. For example, if you are launching a parish-based ministry to support your local pregnancy center, you might decide to host a “baby shower” to benefit the pregnancy center. Or, if your parish has joined with other local parishes or organizations to launch a maternity home, you might decide to host a gala dinner to help fundraise for this exciting new project. Work with your pastor to decide on what type of celebration would be best suited to your parish.



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ELEMENTS TO INCORPORATE IN YOUR CELEBRATION

No matter what type of event you ultimately choose, we encourage you to try and incorporate several of the following elements into your celebration, as appropriate:

Prayer

Prayer is the foundation of the entire *Year of Service*. At the close of this year, we encourage you to find ways to pray together as a parish community during your celebration. We should make it a priority to thank God for all the progress that the parish has made, ask His blessings on all the efforts to come, and continue to pray for pregnant and parenting mothers facing difficulties. Consider different ways that you can include

prayer in your celebration. In addition to opening and closing with prayer, perhaps you want to include a Rosary or guided meditation. Or, maybe you would like to precede your event with Mass, a Holy Hour, or even a Eucharistic Procession. Think about what is best suited to your specific celebration.

Updates on Parish Efforts

Plan to include a brief update on all that your parish has accomplished and what your plans are going forward. If possible, it would be great for your pastor to provide this update. It is very likely that parishioners who are new to the *Year of Service* will join in this celebration. Use this opportunity to bring them up to date and refresh everyone else's memory.

Education

If possible, try to integrate some educational elements into your celebration. While there is no need to plan a lecture or formal presentation, try to think of creative ways to increase parishioners' understanding of the need to support pregnant and parenting women. Consider sharing information that you learned through the inventory process about the needs of mothers in your community or the gaps in resources. Share key takeaways from the *Gospel of Life* and St. John Paul II's call for the Church to reach out to mothers in need. If you are hosting a gala event, this could be as simple as having a keynote speaker mention some of these themes in his or her address. Or, if you are offering a special liturgy, your pastor could include some of these elements into his homily.

Expressions of Thanks

Consider a special way to thank your pastor, the core team, parish leaders, prayer team members, and any volunteers who participated in the *Year of Service* for their work and dedication.

Refreshments

No celebration is complete without refreshments. Plan to incorporate some sort of food and drink into your event. Depending on the type of event you are planning, you may want to provide a full meal, cake and punch, or snacks and finger foods. If you are concerned about supplying enough food for all in attendance, consider making it a potluck. The parish can provide something like burgers and hotdogs and ask each parish family to bring a dish to share. Think about creating a theme for your menu. Your parish could even get creative and encourage participation by making it a contest. For example, incorporate a chili cookoff, asking each parish family to provide a pot of chili or side to go with the theme.



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Activities and Entertainment

Think about what types of activities or entertainment you might like to include as part of your event. If you choose to celebrate with a "baby shower," think of traditional baby shower games that could be adapted to a larger setting. Perhaps you would like to have live music during some portion of the celebration. If you decide to host a picnic, consider having outdoor games that families could

participate in like relay races, ring toss, or water balloons. Think about what your parish community would most enjoy and what would add to the celebratory tone of the event. Activities can provide additional ways for parishioners to interact and get to know one another.



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Celebrate Life!

No matter what shape your celebration takes, make it a point to celebrate the gift of human life. While throughout the *Year of Service* you took time to really focus on the challenges and obstacles facing pregnant and parenting women in need, highlight the truth that life in all circumstances is good and deserves to be celebrated. The beauty and sacredness of human life underlies all the efforts of the *Year of Service*. It is truly a gift from God. Use this event as an opportunity to celebrate this gift as a parish community.

Invite Parishioner Involvement

Use this parish celebration to once again encourage increased parishioner involvement. Take a moment to explain the plans that are being implemented and where your greatest needs are, whether they be prayer, material, or volunteer support. Emphasize the role each parishioner plays in the success of your parish efforts. Have sign-up sheets available and continue to personally invite those in attendance to support your efforts. Remember that most people have to hear about something several times before they make a commitment to get involved.

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In planning your parish celebration, you'll want to make the same logistical considerations as you have in planning previous gatherings throughout the *Year of Service*. This is a great opportunity to put your experience to work once more. Revisit "Hosting a Meeting" on page 25 and "Hosting a Parish-Wide Meeting" on page 48 for general principles on scheduling, communication, preparation, and hospitality that apply to both large and small gatherings. Consider inviting your bishop or diocesan contact person to the celebration. While their busy schedules may prevent their participation, this is a good opportunity share with them what your parish is doing to support moms in need. As always, remember to work closely with your pastor and parish staff to plan this celebration.



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