

HOSTING A PARISH-WIDE MEETING

Once you have evaluated and summarized the results of the inventory and developed options for how your parish can increase outreach to mothers in need, it is time to share this information with your parish community. We recommend doing so at a parish-wide meeting. (You may even want to consider hosting multiple meetings to reach the greatest number of parishioners.) If your parish has multiple language communities, consider hosting meetings in each language. A parish-wide meeting gives you an opportunity to present the results of the inventory and the proposals your parish is considering as a response to what you learned. The meeting would also allow for open discussion, questions, ideas, and feedback from the larger parish community. The following sections guide you through the process of planning and hosting a parish-wide gathering.

LOGISTICAL PLANNING

As you begin to make preparations for your parish-wide meeting, keep in mind that you will use many of the same principles that you used to plan for your core team meetings. The process is very similar, just on a larger scale. (If needed, revisit “Hosting a Meeting” on page 25 to refresh your memory of the basic principles.) To plan the parish-wide meeting you should work very closely with your pastor and parish staff.

Scheduling

Meet with your pastor to choose the date and time of your parish meeting(s). Consider his schedule and the overall schedule of the parish. Be sure there are no obvious scheduling conflicts and that your pastor is able to attend. Also make sure the desired location (parish hall, school gym, meeting room, etc.) is available at this time. Take into consideration the schedules of parishioners who would like to attend. For example, a weeknight evening should hopefully allow for parishioners who work during the day to attend. You may also want to consider having childcare available for families with small children so they can participate as well.

Communication

Once a date, time, and location have been determined, share this information with your parish community, and update any parish schedules or calendars. Sample announcements and homily notes are also provided to help you get the word out. Advertise the meeting in your weekend bulletin, in parish emails and newsletters, on social media, and on bulletin boards in the parish. If you have a parish Facebook page, consider making a Facebook event and inviting parishioners to RSVP there. Be sure to send emails highlighting the meeting information to your core team and parish support network. You may want to solicit their help in planning and hosting the meeting as well. As the date of the meeting draws closer, be sure to send out reminders to your parish community.

Preparation

In preparation for this parish-wide meeting, work with your pastor to finalize all the information that you plan to present, including inventory results and proposed parish responses. Make sure to get his approval on the agenda, presentation, handouts, and speakers for the gathering. Your pastor may wish to present the inventory results himself, or he may prefer for the parish leader and other core team members to serve as the main presenters. His visible involvement is important, though, 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.



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Work with parish staff to have appropriate technical equipment and support, including computers, television monitors, microphones, sound systems, projectors, etc. The anticipated size of your meeting will likely influence the amount of technical equipment you will need. Decide what furniture arrangement you would like, including tables, chairs, and podiums. Recruit members of the core team or parish support network to help you set up and arrange furniture, if necessary.

Decide what handouts you would like to provide parishioners with during the meeting. This could include prayer cards, copies of the completed inventory, the meeting agenda, a summary of the inventory results, a list of proposed parish responses, comment or feedback cards, and so on. If you have multiple handouts, considering making packets and placing them on tables or chairs prior to parishioners' arrival. Be sure to have pens available as well.

Enlist members of the core team to take notes during the meeting. Ask them to record suggestions, positive and negative feedback, and new ideas.

Hospitality

Plan to have members of the core team greet and welcome parishioners and distribute any handouts that you are planning to utilize. Have a sign-in list to collect names and contact information from attendees. Be sure to thank parishioners for their presence and support for mothers in need. If you are planning to have any refreshments available, also have core team members refresh any drinks, snacks, ice, or utensils that may run low during the gathering.

Prayer

Ask your pastor to open and close the meeting with prayer. This gives everyone time to collect their thoughts, place themselves in God's presence, and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your time together. Consider praying the "[Prayer for Pregnant Mothers](#)" together as a community to open and/or close your gathering.

SHARING RESULTS: FINDINGS AND PROPOSED RESPONSES

As part of the process of evaluating the inventory and generating proposed parish responses, you began to summarize your findings in anticipation of the parish-wide meeting. If you have not done so already, determine how you would like to present the information to the parish. You may want to utilize a PowerPoint presentation, a number of printed handouts, or another format. (Samples are available [online](#).) You will likely want to utilize a number of these options. Keep in mind that you want to present the information in the simplest way possible. A simple PowerPoint presentation can be helpful in guiding the discussion, and simple handouts may help communicate more detailed information to parishioners. Finalize the plans for your presentation and be sure to get your pastor's approval of all content. Work with him to determine who will present different portions of the presentation.

To begin the meeting, following the initial welcome and prayer, ask all those present to take a moment to put themselves in the shoes of a pregnant woman in need. Consider sharing a true story of a pregnant woman in need, with her permission. Walk them through the many challenges and obstacles she may have encountered. Emphasize that the reason we are all here is to help ease those burdens by providing loving and life-affirming support.

Share the inventory results in an exciting and positive manner. Help paint the picture of all the efforts of the core team over the past several months. Highlight the wonderful resources that you have discovered and all the good work already being done in your local area. Try to build excitement and engagement throughout the presentation.

Next, move on to sharing the major gaps you identified. Help to illustrate how these gaps could create obstacles to a pregnant woman. Then lead into your proposed ideas for how your parish may respond in order to help bridge some of these gaps. You may want to pause at different points during the presentation to see if there are

any specific questions that can be answered or clarified. Remind the audience that there will be a time for extended questions and discussion following the presentation.

If your pastor is not making the presentation himself, ask if he would like to make any comments before opening the meeting for large-group discussion.

SOLICITING FEEDBACK: LEADING A FRUITFUL DISCUSSION

Work with your pastor to determine who will lead the discussion portion of the meeting. He may wish to lead this section and directly respond to parishioners himself, or he may prefer for the parish leader or a member of the core team to do so. If you are chosen to lead the discussion, keep the following tips in mind to help facilitate a fruitful, large-group discussion:

- Following the presentation of the inventory results, open the floor to questions, comments, ideas, suggestions, and feedback.
- When you are asked a question, answer it to the best of your ability. Consult your core team members or your pastor if you are unsure about an answer. If you do not have an answer available at that time, make a note of the question, and try your best to follow-up on it.
- *Listen*. One of the most important aspects of leading a fruitful discussion is to listen attentively to whomever is speaking. Whether comments and feedback you receive are positive or critical, do your best to understand and affirm where that person is coming from. Even if you disagree with their idea or assessment, strive to find mutual points of agreement.
- *Be open*. Graciously accept suggestions for improvement and consider new ideas brought forth. Thank the person for their feedback and let them know it will be taken into consideration.
- *Respond respectfully*. You will likely receive comments and feedback with which you may initially disagree; however, you should

avoid getting into an argument or public disagreement. Always respond to a person's opinions and ideas with respect. While we hope that parishioners will express their ideas and suggestions respectfully, you may receive some rude or impolite comments. Take these in stride and model respectful behavior for them

- **Stay on topic.** Try your best to keep parishioners on topic. Open discussions have a tendency to drift from the specific matters at hand. When possible, politely redirect the discussion to the main topics. Thank parishioners for their thoughts but indicate that these tangential topics may be better suited to a discussion at another time.
- **Give everyone a chance to speak.** Keep comments and questions to a reasonable length. Ask parishioners to keep in mind that the goal is to allow everyone present to have a chance to share. Respectfully interject when needed in order to move on to the next person. Try to avoid circumstances in which one person is controlling the entire discussion.
- **Be aware.** This gathering may draw those who have had a prior abortion experience and who feel the Church was not there for them in their time of need. It would be helpful to have resources discreetly available from your diocesan abortion healing ministry (often called Project Rachel) in the restrooms, on bulletin boards, and/or in areas near your meeting space. Ask your Diocesan Contact Person for flyers and pamphlets.

Be sure to also have comment cards and pens available during the meeting. (Simple index cards or half sheets of paper work well.) Some parishioners may not be comfortable speaking in front of a large group. Comment cards allow you to still receive their feedback and ideas. They also allow parishioners to share feedback anonymously if they wish to do so. Comment cards are also helpful if you are unable to get to everyone who has something to share. If time runs out, invite those still waiting to speak to share their ideas on the provided cards.



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INVITING VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

As your meeting draws to a close, be sure to genuinely express your gratitude to all parishioners who attended the meeting. Share with them the great encouragement that their presence was to the pastor and the core team. Thank them for actively engaging in this important effort to reach out and support pregnant women in need in your community. And thank them for their ideas, comments, and suggestions. Assure them that all these will be taken into consideration as you determine how your parish will respond.

Also use this opportunity to invite everyone present to join your parish support network. Explain that the next phases of the *Year of Service* will require the help of the entire parish community. Let them know that by signing up, they will be kept in the loop and receive ongoing updates and will also be made aware of opportunities for further involvement like volunteering. Follow up this wider invitation to join the parish's efforts with personal invitations, especially to those who may need extra encouragement.

The most effective invitation is a *personal invitation*. Nothing can replace this one-on-one exchange, whether it be in person that evening or at a later time, or in a personal follow-up email or phone call. A personal invitation demonstrates that you specifically value that individual and his or her unique gifts. This individual recognition encourages those invited to see their own gifts and realize that their gifts are needed by women facing difficult pregnancies.