

PLANNING A PARISH RESPONSE: SAMPLE IDEAS AND MODELS

Once you have reviewed, evaluated, and summarized the inventory results, plan to gather with your core team to discuss possible parish responses and solutions to the challenges identified. Depending on the number of gaps you identified, this may need to be accomplished in a series of meetings. Together, you will brainstorm possible responses to each gap you identified. Then together, you will consider what an appropriate parish response might be based on your parish's capacity. While your parish will not be able to tackle every gap identified, specific areas may emerge that your parish could come together to address. You may also want to consider working with neighboring parishes to divvy up and address specific gaps in the community. Or, you may want to team up with a nearby parish or two to take on larger projects.

The following sections guide you through this planning process and offer sample ideas and models that can help you get started. However, this is the time to get creative! Your parish has something unique to offer to your community. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide this creative effort to better serve mothers in need in your community.

BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS TO IDENTIFIED GAPS

During the evaluation of your inventory results, your core team took time to identify the gaps in resources. As part of planning your parish response, your team should go through the identified gaps and brainstorm possible solutions and ways to fill those gaps. While your parish will not be able to fill every gap, this will help you to see what is required to address the gaps in local resources. You may brainstorm multiple solutions in each area. Some of your ideas may not *completely* fill the gap, but they may help to provide a bridge between missing services.

For example, you may have identified a lack of food resources in your local area. There may be a food bank that serves your community, but it is over an hour away and the distance presents an obstacle to mothers trying to feed their families. One solution may be to start a food pantry. Perhaps your parish has the capacity to lead this initiative, or you could think about joining with other area parishes or churches to get this off the ground. Perhaps your parish may not be ready to launch an official food bank, but you want to start by doing periodic food and diaper drives at the parish that would be distributed to mothers in need. Perhaps the food bank that is a little far away would allow members of your parish to pick up food and distribute to those in need in your area. This could help bridge the gap for pregnant mothers or those with small children who are unable to travel a long distance.

This example illustrates the diverse ways your core team may come up with to help bridge gaps in resources in your local community. Filling gaps often does not require launching an entirely new ministry, but simply entails thinking of creative ways to make improvements by working together.

By brainstorming solutions to the gaps in your local area, you'll have a list of possibilities that you can consider and discuss how your parish could respond. Your parish may want to try to address the most pressing need, or you may decide to start small with a simple effort and work up to filling larger gaps. You'll want to consider what your parish's resources and capacities may be and what the most urgent needs are in your community. Let the Holy Spirit guide you through this process. Do not be afraid to dream big because with Christ nothing is impossible. And while your parish may not be able to commit to a large effort right away, you may be able to slowly work toward fulfilling these larger dreams of serving mothers in need. *Do not set limits on what God can accomplish through your parish community!*

SAMPLE IDEAS FOR IMPROVING PARISH OUTREACH

The following ideas can be used as jumping off points for your parish to consider as possible efforts to serve pregnant women in need. This list is hardly exhaustive, but it can help you begin brainstorming and serve as a source of inspiration. Keep in mind the unique needs of your community and the gifts and resources that your parish has available. For additional examples of parish efforts, visit our [website](#) where ideas will continue to be shared.

Clothing Drive (Baby and Maternity Clothes)

Conduct a clothing drive to benefit a local pregnancy center, maternity home, or Catholic charities agency. Collect new or gently used baby and maternity clothing. If you are collecting clothing for a specific organization, ask them what types of clothing and sizes are most needed, and share this list with the parish community.

Diaper Drive

Conduct a diaper drive to benefit a local pregnancy center, maternity home, or Catholic charities agency. Consider doing a collection on a regular basis, such as every other month. If you are collecting diapers for a specific organization, ask them what sizes are needed most urgently, and share this information with the parish community.

Food Drive

Conduct a food drive to benefit a local food bank, pregnancy center, soup kitchen, or parish-based food pantry. Consider doing a collection on a regular basis, such as once a month. If you are collecting food for a specific organization, ask them what items are needed most and share this list with the parish community.

Volunteer Drive

Host a volunteer-drive in your parish. You may need volunteers to support your parish-based ministry or to help support a community organization that provides pregnancy-related resources or services. Often pregnancy centers,



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Catholic charities agencies, food banks, and other organizations rely on volunteers and are in desperate need for more support. Collect names, contact information, interests, and general volunteer availability of members of your parish. Try to match parishioners with the volunteer needs of the parish or partner organizations. You may even want to organize regular times that a group from the parish volunteers at an outside organization. *The possibilities are endless!*

Moms Mentoring Program

Many pregnant women in need could use the help and support of a fellow mother as they navigate this complex and emotional stage in their life. Having one-on-one support from a mother who has shared similar challenges and trials can provide much needed encouragement and assistance. Pregnant women could be invited to form a relationship with a “mentor mom,” who can walk with them on their journey and help answer all sorts of practical and spiritual questions. Creating a mothers’ mentoring program can provide mothers in need with the accompaniment they desire.

“Baby Shower” for a Local Pregnancy Center

Consider hosting a “baby shower” to support your local pregnancy center. Get a list of needed items from the pregnancy center (much like a gift registry) and ask parishioners to bring items on the list to the shower. The center may wish to send a representative to receive the donations.

Sometimes they may even send some of their client moms. During the shower, gather as a community and pray for pregnant mothers (maybe a Rosary!), play music, enjoy cake, snacks, and punch, and play games. Invest in some simple and inexpensive decorations to make it feel like a true party and celebration for all the moms the pregnancy center will be helping. If needed, consider asking for donations or selling tickets to cover the cost of the food and supplies.

Fundraisers

Host a fundraiser to benefit your parish-based ministry or a local pregnancy-help organization. Ideas for fundraisers could include a baby bottle drive, 5K race, bake sale, craft fair, gala, breakfast, lunch, dinner, afternoon tea, picnic, festival, car wash, second collection, or occasional poor box collection. Get creative and think about what would work best in your specific community.

Print Pregnancy Resources in Your Bulletin

Commit to printing pregnancy resource information in your bulletin every weekend. This is a great first step for communicating to parishioners and those in need the Church's desire to serve and support pregnant women.

Childcare Program

Reliable childcare is a significant need for many mothers. Pregnant and parenting women may need help caring for their children so they can earn extra income, take classes, run errands, or go to doctor appointments. Your parish could provide simple, free, childcare by volunteers at the parish at specified days and times each week. Invite mothers in need to submit the days and times they are most in need of childcare and see if you are able to accommodate those hours. *Be sure to comply with all diocesan policies and safe-environment trainings and protocols for working with children.*

Mothers' Faith-Sharing or Prayer Group

Women facing a difficult pregnancy are often in need of emotional and spiritual support and encouragement. A mothers' faith-sharing or prayer group is a great way to accompany mothers in

need by offering a supportive community. Such groups provide opportunities for mothers to share and discuss the joys and challenges of their vocation in a faith-based environment.

Parenting or Job Training Classes

Many parishes offer classes and trainings to their parish community to help members develop specific skills, abilities, and talents. For example, parishes may offer language courses, financial trainings, or citizenship classes. Your parish may want to offer parenting or job training classes, which mothers in need may find especially helpful. Consider contacting your local Catholic charities agency to see if they can provide any of these classes in your parish or train parishioners to teach such courses.

Maternity Home

Many mothers in need struggle to find safe and affordable housing. A local maternity home can be an incredible resource for mothers who need either short or long-term housing. Some parishes have housing or buildings that are no longer being used that could be converted into maternity homes. Parishes may also receive donations of homes or properties from parishioners that could become housing to pregnant women in need. While starting a maternity home is a big undertaking, consider how multiple parishes could come together to support a maternity home. Or consider if your parish could support the diocese or the local Catholic charities agency to get such a project off the ground.



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MODELS FOR PARISH-BASED MINISTRIES

Based on your survey results and discernment about what the Lord is calling your parish to do, you may determine that you would like to start a parish-based ministry to provide spiritual and material support to pregnant women in need. This ministry could be an offshoot of an established parish outreach or service committee, or it could be something new entirely. As you think about what your parish-based ministry might look like, we have provided overviews of some existing models. There is certainly no pressure to adopt any particular model listed here. Rather, these are provided to give your parish ideas and inspiration about the shape your ministry may take. If a particular model does happen to resonate with your parish, knowing that others have gone before you can make this effort less intimidating. For additional examples of parish efforts, visit our [website](#) where ideas will continue to be shared.

The Gabriel Project / Project Gabriel / The Gabriel Network

www.gabrielproject.org

Relying on local parishes and dioceses, The Gabriel Project offers hope and assistance to any mother in need. Pregnant women are paired with trained volunteers called “Angels” from a participating parish who support the woman through friendship, encouragement, and prayer throughout her pregnancy. In addition to emotional and spiritual support, the parish volunteers help the expectant mother with various practical needs and connect her with local resources. These practical needs might include the following: pregnancy information and assistance with pre-natal care; maternity and baby clothes, cribs, strollers, and baby items; referrals for housing, medical care, and counseling; and parenting support or adoption information.

The Gabriel Project hosts a nationwide website that provides a directory to local Gabriel Project ministries across the country.

Elizabeth Ministry International

www.elizabethministry.org

Elizabeth Ministry is an international movement designed to offer hope, help, and healing on the intimate issues of life, loss, and love. They work to encourage, educate, and equip people through mentoring, programs, and resources related to relationships, sexuality, and childbearing. Elizabeth Ministry serves as a resource center for individuals, couples, families, parishes, hospitals, and other organizations to celebrate the gift of each child conceived and born, and fully mourn each miscarriage, abortion, stillbirth, and infant or child death. They assist people in cherishing children, and witnessing to the dignity of all life, by treasuring the gifts of fertility and pregnancy, supporting those with infertility problems, encouraging people in the adoptive process, and assisting families facing prenatal, infant or children crisis, illness, or special needs. Elizabeth Ministry also works to defend human dignity and relationships by honoring sexuality, promoting chaste living, uplifting the sanctity of marriage, and giving help to those struggling with, or affected by, unhealthy sexual behaviors.

Elizabeth Ministry Chapters are parish-based efforts to support women and their families during the joys, challenges, and sorrows of the childbearing years. Volunteers offer maternal mentoring in the areas they have experienced. For example, a woman who has given birth and raised a family would visit a woman who is pregnant for the first time. She shares prayer, practical help, her lived experiences, and resources in the name of the parish community.

PREPARES

www.preparesforlife.org

PREPARES is a statewide initiative of the Catholic Bishops of Washington State. They provide pregnancy and parenting support and activities through Catholic parishes across Washington State, serving all families from pregnancy to their child's fifth birthday. All are welcome to participate in the free support that PREPARES provides.

PREPARES supports the commitment to the sanctity of human life, especially in its most vulnerable early stages. It seeks not only to assure healthy births and avoid the tragedy of abortion, but also to provide emotional support to nurture healthy and flourishing relationships that uphold the vision of the family as the essential unit of society. PREPARES works with parishes to develop support for pregnant women and families and vary based on the parish.

The Catholic bishops of Washington State created and launched the PREPARES initiative in 2014. The first of its kind in the United States, PREPARES creates the capacity within Catholic parishes, other faith communities, and collaborating agencies across Washington State to assist pregnant mothers, fathers, and their families by walking with them on the journey from pregnancy to their child's fifth birthday.

In Washington State, PREPARES is provided and coordinated through Catholic Charities of Spokane, Catholic Charities Serving Central Washington, and Catholic Community Services of Western Washington. Through each of these agencies, the Catholic Church provides life-affirming, professional, supportive services for infant children and their mothers and families including prenatal care, counseling, adoption services, and housing and medical care referrals.

PROPOSED PARISH RESPONSES

At this point you have brainstormed ways to fill the gaps in your local area and reviewed ideas and models for ways your parish could respond. Now is the time to prayerfully discern what your parish may be called to do. In this step, your core team, in collaboration with your pastor, should create a short list of possible parish responses that you would like to propose during the parish-wide meeting. We suggest having some variety in the options you propose to generate greater feedback from your parish community.



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Again, you may want to create a PowerPoint presentation, a list summarizing your proposals that can be printed and distributed, or something else entirely. No matter how you plan to share this information, we encourage you to *keep it simple*. Do what works for your parish. The goal is to present your proposed parish responses in the simplest and easiest way possible and get feedback from your parish community.