



Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service During the Coronavirus Pandemic

One thing the coronavirus has shown is that we are all connected. As St. Paul proclaimed, "Now the body is not a single part, but many." Let us reflect on the great need for solidarity with another. Let us heed Pope Francis's warning that there is a danger that we have forgotten those who are left behind. The risk is that we may be struck by the virus of selfish indifference, becoming blind to the challenges of others.

Huge challenges face many women in difficult or unplanned pregnancies – including a lack of financial resources and life-affirming support networks. Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes – not necessarily the building, not until the Coronavirus Pandemic ends – and our neighborhoods. These women are among those on the peripheries whom Pope Francis calls us to serve more intentionally. Women facing challenging pregnancies and parenting should see the Church – with its extensive social services dedicated to meeting the needs of people in crisis – as a place where they can find help, friendship, encouragement, accompaniment, and mentoring.

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Imagine a future when any pregnant woman in need can turn to the local parish and get connected to life-affirming help for her and her child. We – not the Office, but we the parishes and the people who compose the parish – are asked to improve our pastoral responses to women facing unexpected or challenging pregnancies. When more than 20% of the workforce is unemployed or underemployed, when parents struggle with balancing life and home schooling, every pregnancy may be challenging.

Each parish is best able to identify its available local pregnancy help resources and conduct an honest assessment of its efforts in assisting pregnant women in need. Then each parish is best able to identify potential gaps that need to be addressed – in short, to truly and concretely accompany each pregnant woman in need.

Walking with Moms in Need: More than an Inventory

Each parish community is uniquely positioned to encourage a collaboration of resources – pregnancy help-related resources, general help-related resources, and help available from the parish – at the local level. Each parish is uniquely positioned to communicate these resources and to increase awareness of help available to mothers and families in need. Therefore, *Walking with Moms in Need* is much more than an inventory.

The *process of inventorying* local pregnancy help resources can be a good opportunity for parishioners to work together. A parish focus on help for pregnant and parenting moms in need can be a unifying message. It can move the conversation from what sometimes seems like a partisan divide into pastoral unity. It can initiate or improve upon the collaboration of those who work on social ministry and pro-life efforts because *Walking with Moms in Need* is about helping pregnant moms. There is nothing to argue about.

The protection of human life and promotion of human dignity is a hallmark of Catholic social teaching. In addressing all of these concerns, we must be Jesus' heart of mercy, voice of hope and hands of justice in a world that too often devalues the unborn, the poor and the vulnerable.

Collaboration between parishes might be prudent. Each parish, however, is asked to participate in *Walking with Moms in Need*. It is not a duplication of efforts; it is about each parish community *developing relationships with providers*. It is about each parish becoming a welcoming parish to moms in need, not handing a mom in need a list of area resources.



Respect the Rhythm and Wisdom of the Holy Spirit

Do not rush this. Since the foundation of everything we do is prayer, a parish and its parish community must begin by prayerfully considering how God is calling them to respond. You can't rush prayer!

Before the Coronavirus Pandemic, the U.S. Bishops designed *Walking with Moms in Need* to be broken into five easy phases, each with its own specific steps. Although current reality has altered our best-laid plans, with the right attitude and the counsel of the Holy Spirit, you can still be neighbor.

This is not a one-size-fits-all program! Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Getting Started

Someone needs to be **the parish leader**, a main point of contact and coordinator – someone collegial and collaborative – for *Walking with Moms in Need*. Originally, we wanted the pastor to make this appointment, but the Coronavirus Pandemic has given your pastor other things to think about. Please volunteer ... then please notify your pastor of your commitment.

Jesus wasn't alone; he had his apostles. The parish leader then assembles **a parish core team**. Because one goal of *Walking with Moms in Need* is increasing the unity among the parish community, the core team must be representative of your parish: someone from your Respect Life Ministry, Peace and Justice Ministry, Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul, etc. Different age groups, different genders, and different ethnicities.

The parish core team will meet throughout the *Year of Service* and complete various tasks, such as the parish inventory, assessment, and response planning and implementation.

Jesus had more than just his apostles; he depended on his disciples. As the project continues, grows, and develops, you will need wider parish support. Establishing a simple **parish support network** allows you to inspire broader parish involvement and enlist assistance during later phases.

And Then...

Now that there's a parish leader, with his or her trusted parish core team, please email me at mcato@archdpdx.org and we will discuss what's next.

The finish line to the Coronavirus Pandemic may seem so far off that we can't see it. Yet we must believe that the pandemic will end. We don't have to wait for the end of the pandemic, however, until our world is a better place. You and you and you can each contribute to making our world a better place. Let's start by *Walking with Moms in Need*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Cato".

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