

MOST REVEREND
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Dear brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Praise be Jesus Christ!

At the U.S. bishops' meeting last November, dioceses and parishes were invited to devote a year of service to pregnant women starting this March. The initiative, called "Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service," is intended to help mothers in our local communities who face an unexpected or challenging pregnancy.

I encourage all parishes and Catholics in Western Oregon to participate in this very worthy effort, **especially in inventorying local pregnancy help resources.**

Huge challenges face many women in difficult or unplanned pregnancies — including a lack of financial resources and life-affirming support networks. These women are among those on the peripheries whom Pope Francis calls us to serve more intentionally.

The parishes of Western Oregon must be places where they can turn for support. In many cases, our parishes already help women in desperate situations by supporting pro-life pregnancy centers, collecting supplies for new mothers and contributing to other charitable endeavors. Our Catholic Charities agency also helps pregnant women in crisis situations.

But are we effective at communicating that help directly to women in desperate situations? Do parishioners know the places or resources to recommend if they encounter a pregnant or parenting woman in need of help? Indeed, has your parish compiled a comprehensive list of pregnancy assistance resources in the area? How are those resources promoted both inside and outside the parish community? In what other ways can your parish accompany pregnant women in need?

This inventory of local pregnancy help resources can be a good opportunity for parishes to work together. It can initiate or improve upon the collaboration of those who work on social justice and pro-life efforts because the protection of human life and 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.

The official launch of "Walking with Moms in Need" in March will mark the 25th anniversary of "Evangelium Vitae," St. John Paul II's encyclical on the "Gospel of Life," in which he challenges us to take all the steps necessary to serve a "culture of life." This initiative — combined with our ongoing pro-life efforts — is another step in the right direction.

Our diocesan contact person for the *Year of Service* is Matt Cato, Director of the Office of Life, Justice & Peace mcato@archdpdx.org. He and his team will begin contacting parishes after Easter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alex Sample'.

Most Rev. Alexander K. Sample
Archbishop of Portland in Oregon