



A beautiful and practical way to do this is to start an

“Elizabeth Ministry” or “Respect Life”

group in your parish. These ministries are designed to support women and their families through the joys, trials and sorrows of their childbearing years. Many parishes have home help ministries already, but there is a special value in establishing a visible group specifically to support pregnant mothers and to celebrate and serve the Gospel of Life.

www.elizabethministry.com

Prayer and the Sacraments during Pregnancy

A mother nurtures her baby not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually. Pregnancy can be a time of great grace as a woman bonds with her unborn baby and looks forward joyfully to meeting this new little person God has entrusted to her.

For many mothers and fathers, hectic schedules, the needs of their children and the many responsibilities they bear make it hard for them to meet their own spiritual needs. But these needs are very real and cry out to be satisfied even more than our bodily needs. Christ longs to love, forgive, heal and restore each of us through our coming to him, as often as we can, in prayer, Reconciliation and the Eucharist!

Some parishes provide a Mothers' holy hour, Dads' holy hour, Adoration or Rosary so that young parents can receive the spiritual nourishment they need. A lovely practice in some parishes is to designate a particular weekday Eucharist as a special Mass for mothers and babies. We may be able to help in practical ways by caring for the children during Adoration, Rosary or Reconciliation, so that mothers can have some much-needed prayer time.

(Endnotes)

1. Homily, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Sistine Chapel, January 7, 2007.
2. Angelus, St Peter's Square, December 31, 2006.
3. Message for the 40th World Communications Day, January 24, 2006.
4. *Evangelium Vitae*, 82.
5. *Evangelium Vitae*, 90.
6. *Familiaris Consortio*, 85.
7. Psalm 34:18.
8. Lamentations 3:23.

If you or someone you know is having a baby and needs support...

In the Sydney area

**Centacare Pregnancy
Counselling and Support Service** 8709 9333
**Pregnancy Help Sydney
(for counselling/support)** 9602 6543
(to volunteer) 9602 6100

Australia-wide

(for information about pregnancy help services available in your region)

Pregnancy Help Australia 1300 139 313
Real Choices Australia 1300 886 017



Level 11, Polding Centre
 133 Liverpool Street
 Sydney NSW 2000
www.lifeoffice.org.au
 (02) 9390 5283

lifeoffice

...proclaiming, celebrating and serving the Gospel of Life



**Marriage &
Family Office**
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney



Welcoming & Celebrating! the Gift of New Life!

The joy and happiness of a couple when they realise their love has been blessed with a child is something beautiful and overwhelming – the realisation of the hopes and prayers of their wedding day. Marriage is a vocation from God to love each other and be open to the gift of children; to become a “living image of God’s love”.² But being open to new life has become increasingly difficult in our society. Young parents need our prayers, our practical support and our love if they are to faithfully and joyfully live their calling – what Pope Benedict has described as “the difficult but sublimely satisfying vocation of bringing up children”.³

Sadly, whether in the family, in social networks or in the workplace, the reaction many women receive when they tell someone of their pregnancy is a negative one. Children are often seen as a burden and an expense, instead of a blessing. Their parents need our prayers, our friendship and our love. In our society where contraception and abortion are so prevalent, we need to live the Gospel of Life with love and integrity. Starting with just small things – in the way we respond to the news that a new baby is on the way – we can begin to change the world. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said that “Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.”

The news that a child has been conceived is one of the happiest moments of life! Each new baby is a gift from God – a person, unique and unrepeatable, made in His image. This child is someone who will love and be loved, who will touch and enrich their family, the Church and the world in countless ways.

Sometimes, the discovery of a pregnancy is bittersweet news because a woman feels alone and abandoned, that no one will share her joy in this baby. She may be in a difficult work or relationship situation, without the love and support of family and friends, without the love and faithful commitment of the father of her baby. Single mothers show tremendous courage and love for their babies in choosing to give life under difficult circumstances, and for this, we honour and celebrate them! To welcome a child is to welcome Christ himself:

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me” (Matthew 18:5).

Whether she is married or single, every pregnant woman and her baby deserve to be honoured and loved.

The Church gives thanks for the gift of every new life and honours the woman who bears that life. Every child is precious, no matter how he or she was conceived, because God has willed and loved this child from eternity: *“My days were shaped before one came to be” (Psalm 139).*

For every mother, whatever her age, faith, circumstances or personal situation, the Church must be

“a people at the service of life”⁴

– a sign of God’s faithful and tender love for mother and baby.

Pressures on families today

The Church understands and appreciates the many struggles young families face today in bringing new life into the world and raising and providing for their children. As a society we are working longer hours in order to make ends meet and we struggle to find time for God and for each other. With the high cost of housing, many young couples cannot afford to live near their extended families and access their much-needed support. Single mothers especially and those parents who are trying to manage on one income often face special hardship. The Church, through its parishes and agencies, will continue to advocate for all families, and urge our government at various levels to support motherhood, fatherhood, marriage and childbearing with family-friendly policies – to insist that *“A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies.”*⁵

The Need for the Extended Family

During a woman’s childbearing years, the presence and love of parents, grandparents, in-laws, aunts, uncles, siblings and cousins can be one of her greatest blessings and supports. Sadly, many mothers today are not able to live near their extended family or draw on them for encouragement and support.



They need to be able to discover, in the words of John Paul II, that

“The Church is a home and family for everyone”⁶

We must get to know the young families in our parishes and communities and offer them our sincere friendship, hospitality and prayers, affirming and supporting them in their vocation! Many families have been blessed by the love and support of a kind person in their parish who can be an adopted auntie, uncle or grandparent for their children.

For those struggling with infertility...

To those couples who are still awaiting the blessing of a baby, infertility can be a deeply painful cross – one which takes courage, strength and love to carry. But “the Lord is close to the broken-hearted”⁷ and “his mercies are new every morning”⁸. The Church prays with you and for you that you will be blessed with the gift of children! (For medical assistance that is in harmony with Catholic teaching and respects the body, children and marriage, please contact FertilityCare at www.fertilitycare.com.au).

Fathers



“Every child who is born brings us God’s smile and invites us to recognize that life is his gift, a gift to be welcomed with love”
Pope Benedict XVI¹



In his vocation to fatherhood, a man loves in special ways that reflect the love of God as Father. Every mother and baby need the unconditional love of a good husband and father; and when that is lacking, for whatever reason, it is a deep loss that is felt in many ways. The Church honours and gives thanks for good fathers everywhere! May you raise your own sons, and encourage other men, to live their vocation faithfully and always be a source of love, strength and safety for the women who bear their children.

Mothers

In her vocation to motherhood, a woman images God’s love to the world in a special way – a love that is pure, accepting of the other, unconditional and forever. As she gives her body to nurture and sustain her baby’s life, a mother imitates the profound, self-giving love of Christ, who gave his body on the cross that we might have life. *“She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral...the tiny perfection of her baby’s body.”* – Cardinal Mindszenty

To all mothers who are welcoming the gift of children, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, the Church honours you and thanks you for your generosity and love! We pray for a happy, healthy pregnancy for you and safe delivery of your baby. We entrust you with love to the intercession of Mary, our Mother. She loves you and prays for you and your baby, and shares in your great joy of being a mother!

Supporting women during and after their pregnancies...

Pregnancy is a time of great joy and deep happiness for a woman, but often it is mixed with physical pain, stress and vulnerability – morning sickness, nausea, exhaustion, anxiety about the future, struggling to care for other children or to keep working outside the home.

To support a woman both during and after her pregnancy, we need to be aware of her needs – physical, emotional and spiritual – and look for practical ways to help meet these needs.

Physical needs

- bring meals or invite her and her family for meals at your home
- help with grocery shopping
- help with housework or any particular tasks she may find physically difficult
- be aware of her special needs in the first few months after baby is born, when many mothers may experience difficulties breastfeeding and some may suffer post-natal depression

- take her out for lunch, a movie or just some quiet time to talk and relax
- look after her children at her home, so she can get some much-needed sleep
- organise a “Pregnant and Pampered” evening at your parish or school
- donate the baby clothes, carseats, prams, etc you no longer need to a young mother in your parish or neighbourhood, or to your local pregnancy help centre
- offer to babysit the older children so that parents can have some special “pre-baby” time together – perhaps a weekend away.
- if she is a single mum, be especially aware that she is carrying the load of two people. Look after her children so that she can have some special and much-needed time for herself!
- offer to be the “back up” person or emergency contact if she goes into labour unexpectedly
- volunteer with your local pregnancy help centre! (Please see below for contact details)

Emotional and Spiritual needs

- sincerely share in her joy!
- pray for her and her baby
- be there for her when she is feeling tired, unwell, worried or in pain
- send her a card expressing your support and prayers
- listen to her, and allow her to express her fears, worries, hopes and dreams
- telephone, email or visit her regularly to let her know you care about her
- bring her flowers
- celebrate her baby by organising a baby shower for her – at your home, your parish hall, her workplace, or a favourite park or restaurant
- volunteer to help with a mothers’ group, Respect Life group or Elizabeth Ministry in your parish
- help to look after her children during Mass, so that she can have time to pray
- if your parish is part of the Archdiocese of Sydney, volunteer to be a parish contact for the Archdiocesan Family and Life Network so that you can share information and support

Mary and Elizabeth

In Luke 1:39-45 we read how Mary went joyfully to her pregnant cousin Elizabeth and brought Christ’s love to her through the unborn Jesus in her womb. As “the people of life” we are called to follow in Mary’s footsteps, quick to love and serve the pregnant women in our families, parishes and communities, sharing Christ’s love for them and their unborn children.

