

Summary Report – Existing Resources & Current Needs

Walking with Moms in Need is a nationwide, parish-based initiative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and has been adopted by the Richmond Diocese to increase support for pregnant and parenting mothers in need. Pope St. John Paul II wrote in *Evangelium Vitae* that “appropriate and effective programs of support for new life must be implemented, with special closeness to mothers who, even without the help of the father, are not afraid to bring their child into the world and to raise it.” It is the mission of *Walking with Moms in Need* to develop such programming in Charlottesville, especially at the parish level. We want to be able to ensure that any woman who finds herself unexpectedly pregnant, or parenting in difficult circumstances, can turn to her local Catholic Church and be connected with the resources she needs. As Pope Francis explained, “Catholic parishes should be “islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference.”

Walking with Moms in Need ministry members have been researching resources to serve Moms in need in this locality and to understand where gaps exist. We are now at the stage of sharing our work with the Parish so we can begin to assess needs and plan a ministry. Our resource inventory will be published on the parish website early next week. We encourage every parishioner to review it carefully and to come to one of our listening sessions to help us plan the work of this ministry.

This brief presentation is intended only to highlight our key finding. The heart of our research will not surprise you: two Sundays ago, we recommended that parishioners support LifeSpring Pregnancy Centers through a Baby Bottle campaign because we found it to be the single most effective support for Moms in need in the Charlottesville and Albemarle area. With that said, we also believe it is under-resourced for its important mission. For example, its hours are limited and do not include weekends or any evenings. We even had difficulty scheduling volunteer training because training is only available during office hours.

We can also see that LifeSpring is under-resourced in comparison to other organizations that surround Charlottesville and Albemarle County on all sides but most of which are an hour away. One exception is the Paul Stefan Regional Home & Education Center located about 39 miles away in Orange. It is the largest and closest residential maternity facility in our area. It is Christian and was founded by a Catholic family. It provides mothers with a home for at least two years if needed

and offers a mother in need a community that includes life skills training, food, supplies, counseling, employment and educational support. The Home can house 20-25 mothers, each with a child. On its website are the beautiful faces of about 75 of the children it has saved in 10 years of operating. It has saved many more.

Similarly, *Mary's Shelter* in Fredericksburg has been around even longer—20 years—and it too provides housing, a community, and a wide range of wrap-around supports. There are also maternity homes called *Mary's Choice, RVA* in Richmond, and *Eastgate Ministries* in Harrisonburg also providing a variety of services and residential communities for mothers and their children. All of these are wonderful organizations; they would accept mothers in need from our community; and we would not hesitate to make a referral for a mother who can relocate to another community.

The gap we see is the difference between the robust services provided by maternity homes that provide reliable housing and daily emotional, spiritual and community support, and the more limited, but nevertheless extremely valuable services that LifeSpring can offer to women who need or want to remain in the Charlottesville area. Local women who visit LifeSpring will get Christian counseling and the invaluable ultrasound that encourages and supports her decision to keep her baby. She will find love and comfort and will get referrals for assistance, and a variety of direct material support. What she may not find is a community or a mentor willing to walk alongside her who she can call on for support and friendship at any time.

We believe that Charlottesville's Catholic community has a heart to serve women in need, and that there are solutions to this resource gap. But any solution must begin with God's love, and must allow his grace to lead us into a conversation. We want to listen to you, and need your help in planning and building a ministry. We invite each of you to visit our web page next week and to review our Parish Inventory. We also invite you to one of our listening sessions where we will exchange information, answer your questions and solicit your ideas. Some of you may know of resources or strategies we should consider. Others may know someone who worked at one of the organizations we have listed in our inventory or an organization we have missed. Others of you may have made a referral or received services. We want your ideas and we want to build a community-wide effort. This

ministry is intended to be parish-wide and to engage everyone so that all parishioners will be able to share our resources and our love with a mother in need.

We invite you to our conversations after the Masses on the Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent. We will be meeting on the Fourth Sunday of Lent in the Commons at 10:00 a.m., and on the Fifth Sunday of Lent after the Saturday Vigil Mass, and after the Latin Mass on Sunday.

Please join us!