



Q. What is PREPARES?

A. PREPARES – Pregnancy and Parenting Support - is a program initiated by the bishops of our state in 2014. It began as a conversation about how to live out our Catholic teachings about the value of all human life and the prerequisite to protect and help those in need. In other words, the bishops sought to “walk our talk” regarding the intrinsic connection of life and justice. PREPARES was devised as a parish-based program that would assist young, vulnerable families in need during the first five years of their child’s life. The goal is that pregnant women and families without adequate resources can obtain essential resources through our parishes. Many parishes already had programs that assisted pregnant women and families and most now participate in the PREPARES program. Statewide, there are currently 167 parishes actively providing this ministry with the help of nearly 1000 volunteers. Over 10,000 women and families have been helped over the past 6 years through the efforts of parish volunteers and PREPARES coordinators across the state.

Q. How are parishes involved in the PREPARES program?

A. From the beginning, the bishops envisioned PREPARES as a ministry. With that vision, they asked the Catholic Charities agencies across the state to assist the parishes in setting up the program, and to help in the training of parish volunteers. Catholic Charities agencies across the state have staff coordinators who work with individual parishes to either initiate a PREPARES program or to expand their present program. Charities staff assist parishes in organizing volunteers and have a very detailed and helpful program to train volunteers who want to act as mentors with families. Mentors walk with a specific pregnant woman or family, listening to them and guiding them, and by assisting them to find the resources that they need.

One parish volunteer recognized the disproportionality virtual classrooms bring to many low income Hispanic students and began tutoring young kindergarten PREPARES children each day. She also coaches other family companions in navigating difficult circumstances with families they are supporting through a weekly virtual support group. The volunteer mentored a young 21-year-old pregnant mom. After the birth of her son, the mom said “ My mentor was the first person to reach out to me after delivery, she is the kindest person I have ever met; she is always checking in with me, texting to remind me that while I'm overwhelmed--it will be okay.”

Q. How are dads involved in the program?

A. Some parishes have initiated a specific fatherhood program just for dads. It brings together new fathers to discuss their concerns with men who are raising or have raised their children. In light of the pandemic, communication now occurs virtually. Fathers, valued and critically important in their role with their children, are matched to male mentors to help in the journey of parenthood.

Q. Is the PREPARES program available in the many parishes that serve Hispanic families?

A. Parishes with Spanish masses offer PREPARES en español. Volunteers are trained to work in their native language to meet the needs of low-income Hispanic families. Many families in farmworker communities are assisted with their need for infant/toddler clothing, diapers, food, and other support. These needs have increased exponentially since the pandemic. PREPARES volunteers are there to walk with families during these struggles and bring needed resources.

Q. What kind of services does PREPARES offer?

A. Based on the individuals or families in need, parishes may help with diapers, clothing, or food drives to collect items. We never want a family to have to choose whether to buy diapers or food for their family.

With the impact of the pandemic, many PREPARES volunteers have worked with food banks to distribute diapers, clothing and food to PREPARES families. During the pandemic many PREPARES volunteers adapted and began virtually visiting moms and dads as well as expand to 'parking-lot' PREPARES where the ministry responds to heightened needs of families in a pandemic safe way.

PREPARES also builds community for families that find themselves isolated or alone by creating support groups, parenting classes, and play groups that foster community and opportunities for peer friendships. During the pandemic, these groups have all gone virtual, continuing to support families despite not being able to gather in person.

Volunteers in the parishes have also become knowledgeable about resources that help pregnant women. The great advantage of having the program managed by the local Catholic Charities agency is that the issues of homelessness, housing, legal, mental and physical health, parenting classes, etc. are addressed with agency professional services.

Q. Does PREPARES serve only Catholics?

A. No, PREPARES serves anyone who comes to in need. We don't ask about beliefs, we ask how we can help.

Q. How do people find out about PREPARES?

A. Many people find out by word-of-mouth, through their parish, a volunteer, their local Catholic Charities agency or through the PREPARES website which can be found at Preparesforlife.org. PREPARES staff also spend many hours building connections and partnerships with hospitals, organizations and local communities.

Q. How can parishioners get involved in the PREPARES program?

A. Many parishioners are involved by donating food, diapers, clothing, and other essential needs to their parishes. Many individual parishioners help deliver or distribute the goods that their parish has collected. Parishioners lead parenting, playgroups or fatherhood groups. Other volunteers are matched to a mother, father or family to walk the journey of parenthood in one-on-one engagement.

One parish turned a room into an outreach center due to the impact of COVID-19, collecting and distributing food, diapers, wipes, formula, clothing and other needs of young families impacted by the pandemic.

For those who cannot assist directly, PREPARES always welcomes financial contributions. This year for the first time ever, the bishops of the state are asking the faithful to open their hearts – to this pro-life, pro-family initiative and contribute whatever to the **Statewide Bishops’ Valentine PREPARES Appeal**. Donors are urged to respond to the Valentine Appeal that they will receive in the mail or to go online to make a donation at **PREPARESforlife.org**

Q. How has PREPARES made a difference in peoples’ lives?

A. Beyond the many success stories about how vulnerable families receiving the services have their lives changed, there are equally as many stories from volunteers who have found renewal of their faith and life altering change by experiencing this hands on ministry. The following is one volunteer’s expression of her experience with PREPARES:

“At this time in my life I wanted a personal relationship with Christ’s poor and marginalized. PREPARES spoke to my heart. In walking with people who have far less than I have, I became humbled by my biases and assumptions about poor people. I now see struggling individuals as resourceful survivalist doing the best they can. I feel small for judging them. My faith has become stronger, as I now see how much God loves all of us. My heart beats with compassion and profound respect for those living on the margins, and I am grateful to God for the life changing experience PREPARES gave me.”

PREPARES information, referral & volunteer opportunities in your area contact:

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