

The Gabriel Project of California

Volunteer Handbook

Handbook Updated
JUNE 2019



Gabriel Project Volunteer Handbook

Dear Gabriel Volunteers,

Welcome to a very special pastoral outreach and thank you for *answering the call*. You are about to embark on what will be a most beautiful, inspiring, and occasionally challenging experience.

In your role as a Gabriel Volunteer you will be offering emotional and spiritual support, friendship, material resources, and a great deal of love to pregnant mothers in need of support. This work may seem overwhelming - and it would be - if we were doing it alone. Remember, this is God's work and we have been chosen to carry it out through His grace. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you and trust Him to lead and support you. This Project is a walk in faith for us as we bring hope and love to those who need it most.

This Volunteer Handbook is intended to help you better understand your role and address many of the concerns Gabriel clients may have.

Most importantly, pray for guidance to discern God's will and to have the perseverance to faithfully carry out His plan for you, the moms and families you are helping.

As you study this Gabriel Volunteer Handbook, keep in mind the goal of this Project: To see Jesus and His Blessed Mother in each woman and child He sends our way.

THE GABRIEL PROJECT
of California

Tel: 925 686-9277

Email: davidzarri@earthlink.net

This handbook has been adapted from the Volunteer Handbook of The Gabriel Project of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, portions of which were adapted from resources produced by the *Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston* and *Great Lakes Gabriel Projects*.

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Prayer for Mother and Child

Heavenly Father,

Who has given us the great gift of life,
bless and guide all pregnant mothers
that they might respect and cherish
the gift of life growing within them.
Help each mother to accept her child
as an irreplaceable gift from you.
Grant that all her needs be met.

Bless all children yet unborn.
Watch over them as they grow and
develop in the embrace of their mothers'
wombs. Form them and shape them
that they might be born healthy.
Grant that they might be welcomed at
birth with tender love and deep joy.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

Amen

The Angelus

The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with
thee; blessed art thou among women and
blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us
sinners, now and at the hour of
our death. Amen.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

Be it done unto me according to Thy
word.

Hail Mary . . .

And the Word was made Flesh.

And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary . . .

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we
may be made worthy of the promises of
Christ.

Let us pray:

Pour forth, we beseech thee O Lord, thy
grace into our hearts that we, to whom the
incarnation of Christ thy Son was made
known by the message of an angel, may
by his passion and cross, be brought to the
glory of his Resurrection, through the
same Christ Our Lord.

Amen

Our Message to Moms:

Your life is not the same. You're pregnant and may be feeling alone, frightened, and overwhelmed by new challenges.

Right now you need a friend you can depend on and trust. One who will walk beside you along your new journey.

You are concerned about your life and future and so too are we.

We are members of the churches in your city and neighborhood.

We are people who care about you and want to help you.

We offer you immediate, practical assistance with your pregnancy.

More than anything else we will embrace you as family and friend.

By employing our individual talents, collaborating with various ministries in the parish or diocese and utilizing community resources, we stand ready to provide you with the kinds of assistance that you need in caring for yourself and your child.

Beside friendship and emotional support, we can provide pastoral care and counseling as well as the more tangible help you are likely to need. We look forward to meeting with you and, together, assessing your specific needs.

The Gabriel Project heartily welcomes you, regardless of your faith background.

What is The Gabriel Project?

The Gabriel Project is a parish-based pastoral outreach, under the direction of The Gabriel Project of California, whose members stand together in their commitment to offer assistance to women and families facing difficult or crisis pregnancies.

In the Gospel of Luke, the Angel Gabriel told Mary the good news that a child would be born and that she was to be the Mother of our Savior. When she asked, "How can this be?" the angel told her not to be afraid for "nothing is impossible with God." The Gabriel Project announces the same comforting message to frightened pregnant mothers:

Fear not, for God is with you! Nothing is impossible with God.

The Role of the Parish

The parish community announces that they see in the creation of each child a fresh expression of God's unfailing love and their commitment to offer assistance to pregnant mothers in need. They make their message known on a "Sign of Hope" placed in front of their church along with an expression of outreach - **PREGNANT? WORRIED? NEED HELP?** - and a toll-free phone number (Helpline).

When a call for help is received, the Helpline volunteer contacts the Coordinator at the participating parish nearest to where the caller lives. The Coordinator then contacts the caller and makes an initial assessment of her situation. A parish volunteer ("angel") is assigned the responsibility for ongoing contact with the mother throughout her pregnancy and somewhat beyond. An initial meeting is arranged to further assess her needs.

The parish community responds with love by providing spiritual, emotional, and material support to help meet those needs.

Through prayer and action the parish assures the mother that she has their love and the love of Christ. If a mother has been abandoned by family or her child's father, the parish volunteers can lovingly help her overcome her sense of loss and loneliness.

Kinds of Assistance

By employing their individual talents, collaborating with various apostolates in the parish or diocese, and utilizing community resources, parishioners stand ready to provide a mother with the kinds of assistance that she needs in caring for her child. These may include:

Friendship and emotional support, pastoral care and counseling, transportation, prenatal care, baby items, education, employment, housing, adoption, financial assistance.

Roles and Responsibilities

Upon becoming a Gabriel Project Volunteer, each person makes a commitment to the Moms they serve. They also acknowledge their commitment to pro-life principles – to never promote or encourage for abortion, contraception or sterilization, in serving women and their families.

They understand that while they are engaged in the work of *The Gabriel Project*, even when they are speaking and acting as individuals, they may be presumed to be representing their parish in all they say and do.

And they are fully aware that their participation in *The Gabriel Project* is a privilege which can be revoked at any time.

The Pastor

Pastors have no assigned duties in *The Gabriel Project*. However, at their discretion, they can choose to participate in various ways, such as:

- Pray for the mothers, babies, families and Angels of the project.
- Provide counseling and spiritual direction to Moms. (This may also be offered by other priests or deacons in the parish, or ministers of a congregation.)
- Encourage participation in the work of the project.
- Advise Coordinators and angels in their work with Moms and their families.

Gabriel Project Coordinator

The Gabriel Project Coordinator oversees the organization of the Project. This includes:

- Promoting the project throughout California (or the diocese).
- Assisting parishes in becoming participants and conducting orientation sessions.
- Providing Helpline volunteers with up-to-date data on participating parishes.
- Maintaining an up-to-date list of all Parish Coordinators and angels.
- Acknowledging receipt of all client referrals from the Helpline and determining if Parish Coordinators to whom client referrals are sent also acknowledge receipt.
- Determining if Parish Coordinators have contacted the client and if not, taking the necessary measures to assure the client is contacted and an assessment of her needs is made.
- Responding to Parish Coordinators' requests for assistance.
- Preparing and making available Gabriel Project literature and Internet resources.
- Providing parish teams with the sources for purchasing the outdoor Gabriel sign.
- Interacting with Parish Coordinators to provide and receive information and updates.

Helpline

The process most often begins with a phone call to the Central Helpline.

The Helpline volunteer asks the caller her name, how far along her pregnancy is, if she is receiving prenatal care, her age, where she lives, and her phone number, and how she learned about Gabriel. She is informed that a volunteer coordinator will contact her for more information so that she can be assisted according to her

needs. For confidentiality purposes should she not be available when called, she is asked if the person who contacts her can be identified as a representative of *The Gabriel Project* or should only leave a name and phone number.

Based on her location, the caller is referred to the coordinator of the parish nearest to where she lives.

The Helpline is for client use only. No volunteer or anyone other than a client should call the Helpline. All requests for information about *The Gabriel Project* should be made to the Gabriel Project Coordinator.

Parish Coordinator

Parish Coordinators are called to be compassionate leaders who coordinate human and material resources. They inspire, motivate and encourage angels and might become personally involved with some Moms.

Ideally there should be at least one assistant coordinator to perform the duties of the primary Coordinator whenever that person is unavailable (vacation, sick, etc.). It is imperative that there be a backup contact person should the Helpline Volunteer or the Project Coordinator be unable to make contact with the Parish Coordinator. The church office Administrator should have a list of all Coordinators' and angels' email addresses and telephone numbers.

Working at all times with approval and/or direction from the Pastor, the Parish Coordinator oversees the organization of the Project within the parish. This includes:

- Initial setup of the Project. (If Coordinator is in place at the time.)
- Recruiting angels.
- Assigning angels to Moms.
- Helping angels fulfill Mom's needs via the parish community and other resources.
- Overseeing angels in their ministry.
- Communication of information to the parish community.
- Ongoing promotion of the Project within the parish.
- Interacting with and responding to various requests from the Project Coordinator.

Commitments

Coordinators are committed to:

- **Responding to each client referral with a sense of urgency.**
- **Matching each Mom with an angel and following up on their interactions.**
- **Following protocols to keep the Project Coordinator fully informed.**

The Coordinators should fully understand the role, responsibilities and procedures of angels. They should go on at least one visit to learn the process, but more importantly Coordinators are very valuable communicators at the heart of the project.

Periodically, the Coordinator should provide information to the parish community (i.e. - Bulletin article, announcement, ministry fairs) People new to the parish or those who were previously unable to volunteer may become interested in actively participating. These updates also make the Project come alive for the parishioners.

If there is a special need that cannot be fulfilled by the angels, an announcement should be made to the

parishioners, as directed by the Pastor, to ask all the members of the parish for help.

By announcing the special needs of the Mom, the entire congregation becomes aware that someone is in need and is being helped by them. Any announcement for special needs should also include a reminder to pray for Mom and her family. Coordinators can also organize prayer trees as needed.

At times, partnering with another local parish might be practical or necessary.

A powerful aspect of *The Gabriel Project* is that, on occasion, parishes can be linked together when a specific client's needs cannot all be met by one congregation.

Dependability

If a Coordinator is going on vacation, is overwhelmed with a family situation or for some reason cannot be available, the Assistant Coordinator must be called upon to fill in so that there is no disruption of services.

Relationship of Parish Coordinator to Project Coordinator

The Parish Coordinator should keep the Project Coordinator fully informed about the organization of the project within the parish. This includes:

- An up-to-date list of all Assistant Coordinators and angels including contact info.
- Notification of periods of time when the Coordinator will be unavailable to receive referrals and who will be filling in during those periods.
- A history of all parish/client activity, including clients who were referred by means other than the Helpline.

Angels

Angels are called to give the love of Christ to the mothers they help. Each Mom should have her own angel so she can receive undivided care and attention. Very often it is the personal Christian witness of her Angel that inspires Mom to seek Christ in her own life.

- Angels befriend and minister to pregnant mothers throughout their pregnancies and somewhat beyond.
- Angels pray for Mom and encourage her at every stage of her journey.
- Angels keep the Coordinator informed about the well being of Mom and child.
- Angels, working with the Coordinator, ask the assistant angels, the parish and the local community resources for specific items or services on behalf of Mom.

Experienced angels find that the most difficult part of their role occurs when they cannot "fix" every problem for Mom. If we want Mom to learn to trust God, we have to begin by modeling that behavior. We might realize that the Mom and/or Dad have repeatedly made poor choices leading to their situations. This reality is difficult to accept and requires much prayer as well as trust in God.

We must understand the differences between our desires and our goals.

- Our desire would be that all the Moms we work with will have all they need and should possess (two-parent families, holiness, chastity, mental health, physical health, emotional health, spiritual health, steady job, all bills paid, etc.).

- Our goal is to serve each Mom we meet with the love of Christ to the best of our ability. We work towards our goals (that is something we have control over), but we pray about our desires and leave those in God's hands.

Commitments

Angels are committed to:

- Replying to Mom promptly.
- Checking up on her regularly.
- Praying for her daily.
- Arranging for or overseeing services and responses to needs.
- Keeping all communications and information confidential.
- Being available when Mom needs a listening ear.
- Communicating with and keeping the Parish Coordinator informed.

Dependability

If an angel is going on vacation, is overwhelmed with a family situation or for some reason cannot be available as an Angel, the Parish Coordinator must be notified to assure that someone fills in so that there is no disruption of services.

Spiritual Support

Mom's pregnancy can be stressful if she is living a lifestyle at odds with God's commandments. Those who support her, in particular her angel, have the privilege to guide her to seek God's will in her life. If Mom is Catholic, clergy in her parish can administer the Sacraments and provide spiritual guidance. Gently invite her to Confession. Offer to drive her and introduce her to a priest if she does not know one. Some negative influences in her life may prevent her from returning to full life within the Church, but don't let that stop you. Make the offer. God will do the rest.

If she is not Catholic, clergy of other faiths can be contacted. Having a stable "father figure" in her life can be extremely important to Mom at this time. A pastor might represent both God's protection of her and his love for her child.

Some Moms helped by the Project will not know God or will not go to church on a regular basis. Praying and going to church are certainly not conditions of our help. However, we want the best for our sisters in Christ and it is natural and loving to invite them to come to Mass with us or to ask if we may pray with them. We can and should pray for the Moms we are helping, but we cannot force them to change their lifestyles or go to church. We are challenged to be Christ-like in our patience and unconditional love as we continue to pray for the Moms and for ourselves that we might know and do God's will. Our relationship with the Mom gives us the opportunity to show her God's love and mercy.

Assistant Angels

Assistant angels help on a more limited basis and might help several Moms with a particular need, such as preparing a meal for the family after Mom comes home from the hospital after delivering the baby. If a Mom needs daily transportation for a limited time, it is best to handle this need with several volunteers coordinated by one angel. For instance, several volunteers can each select a day of the week and each volunteer either takes Mom to or from her destination. Some volunteers enjoy taking a Mom to lunch at a restaurant or they may welcome her to lunch in their home. Some volunteers contribute their talents by knitting blankets and others may babysit or help their Mom with shopping. **Whatever they do, all volunteers working to help Moms in need, act as the Body of Christ and bring love and hope to Moms through their acts of kindness.**

Volunteer Procedures

How client referrals are received and managed

Initial Referral

When a call for help is received, the Helpline volunteer contacts the Parish Coordinator at the nearest participating parish to where the caller lives. **All client referrals are made via email.** *The Project Coordinator is copied on all emails from the Helpline.* The Parish Coordinator is expected to contact the client within 24 hours from when the email referral was **sent to, not received by**, the Coordinator. It is, therefore, essential that Coordinators check their email at least at the end of the business day Monday through Friday.

When a referral is received, the Coordinator is expected to reply to the email with “**Reply All**” so that both the Helpline volunteer and the Project Coordinator will know that the referral has been received. The Coordinator should then contact the client as soon as *possible* and notify the Project Coordinator by email that contact with the client has been made, *even if the Coordinator was only able to leave a telephone message for the client.*

It is always necessary to contact Mom.

Regardless of the information contained in the client referral email, the Coordinator must contact Mom. It is impossible to know all of Mom’s needs or their priority based on the information she provided to the Helpline volunteer. Further assessment of her needs must be made by the Coordinator and even that must be considered “an initial” assessment.

It is always necessary to visit Mom.

Angels must be assigned to visit Mom at which time they will make a more in-depth assessment of her needs. As the relationship between Mom and angel develops over time, even more of her initial needs may be revealed or new ones introduced.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is important, so when leaving a phone message for Mom, give only your name and phone number *unless you know that it's okay to leave more information* (refer to the details provided in the client referral email). Mom will know to be expecting your call. See more about confidentiality under *Assessing Mom’s Needs* below.

Failure of Coordinator to contact Mom

If for some reason the Coordinator doesn’t reply to the initial email referral (using “Reply All”) within 24 hours from when it was *sent*, the Project Coordinator will assume that no attempt to contact the client has been made and will, therefore, personally contact the client. This will avoid causing the client to call the Helpline a second time and will also assure her that *The Gabriel Project* is indeed concerned about her. The Project Coordinator will then personally “Reply All” to notify the Helpline volunteer and the Parish Coordinator that an initial attempt to contact Mom has been made. Whatever measures need to be taken to assure that this client will not be neglected will be determined at that time. *Also, whatever measures need to be taken to assure that no future client will be neglected will be determined at that time or soon after.*

When Mom is referred to the parish by means other than the Helpline

The Gabriel Project welcomes client referrals from other organizations, such as Pregnancy Resource Centers and community services. The preferred way for them to make a referral to us is to have the client call our Helpline on her own. However, if it does happen that a client is referred directly to a parish, the Project Coordinator must be informed about the referral and provided with the same client information as that which would have been available had the referral been made by the Helpline.

The same protocol applies when a Mom comes directly to the parish upon reading the sign outside the church or reading a Gabriel brochure that she picked up inside.

Initial contact between Parish Coordinator and Mom

The Coordinator is the first parish representative to contact Mom. Before doing so, information received from the Helpline volunteer should be recorded on the Client Intake Form. **When speaking to Mom, the Coordinator should record additional details on the Intake Form and make an initial assessment of her needs. Remember the personal touch! Write down additional details in the course of the conversation. Don't make it just quick responses to a series of questions!**

The Gabriel Project is:

Pastoral -- the parish responding by meeting a mother's needs that range from spiritual to material;

Educational -- the parish proclaiming the value and dignity of all life, especially unborn life, through the witness and actions of its members;

Evangelical -- the parish loving and caring for those possibly outside the faith community so that they may be brought to Christ.

Initial visit between Angels and Mom

Having been assigned by the Parish Coordinator, angels will go to Mom's home to greet her, listen to her and assess her needs. Going into her home begins your relationship with the feeling of family and allows the visiting team to experience first-hand what Mom is going through. The following excerpt from The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Vincentian's Manual elaborates on this.

From the Society's beginning, the central and most basic activity of Conferences has been the visitation of the needy in their homes. This is the clearest symbol of our Vincentian charism, which dictates the highest respect for the dignity of the poor. It symbolizes our Vincentian commitment to reach out to the needy, rather than require them to report to an outside service site. In the home, needy persons feel most free to confide their stories of struggle. In that family setting, Vincentians are asked to listen, offer humble advice, and render assistance. (Rule: Part I, Articles 1.2 and 1.7-1.12; Part III, Section 8)

In the modern world, there are certain situations when a home visit is not possible or advisable - for example, those involving homelessness, battering, or safety. Nevertheless, Vincentians should never excuse themselves lightly or regularly from the tradition of home visitation. Even when assistance is given in an emergency from the parish or other service site, Vincentians should follow up with a home visit...

From the beginning, Vincentian visitation to the needy was done in pairs for the protection both of the needy person and the members. The precedent was set by Christ Himself when He sent out the Apostles two by two (MK 6:7). The Society wisely continues this tradition in the interest of safety, liability and propriety

In rare cases, angels will first meet Mom at a location other than her home. For instance, if her parents do not yet know she is pregnant, it would be more prudent not to go to her home.

An angel should never go alone for this first meeting. Two angels usually meet with the Mom and assess her needs using the Intake Form provided by the Parish Coordinator.

Spiritual Preparation

If we hope to bring Mom closer to the Lord, we should prepare ourselves spiritually to be his instruments. Angels must first and foremost be grounded in prayer. When Mary visited Elizabeth after the Annunciation, she took with her the greatest treasure she had, Jesus in her womb. The baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy! As we visit Mom, we must remember the greatest treasure we have to share with her is Christ Jesus. He calls us to be aware of His presence in our lives and to share the love, joy and peace that presence gives us.

Prepare yourself by saying a prayer for Mom and her child before each visit. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to help bring Christ into Mom's heart. Seek to be constantly guided by Him in all you do on her behalf. Be bold in your love for the Lord by sharing glimpses of Him through your words and actions. Set aside personal concerns and be totally attentive to how Mom is feeling and doing.

When visiting with Mom, listen. Let her tell her story, her situation, without input or interruption from you. Be an active, attentive listener. This will tell Mom how much you want to be there for her. The opportunity to give advice, suggestions, and/or comments will come later as you build trust and rapport with her. She will be able to do most of her own problem solving as she talks through her difficulties. Give her the support and encouragement she needs through the information and resources necessary to solve her own problems.

The angel's initial conversation with Mom is as friend-to-friend. The Angel will ask how Mom feels physically, how things are in the family, and how her job or school is going. The Angel might also ask how the father of the baby, her friends and family feel about the baby. The idea is not simply to ask questions in a rapid-fire manner. The idea is to listen with your heart. Mom will recognize a real concern and love on the part of the Angels. If our love of God is shared with joy and hope, Mom will learn to trust God and have confidence in his providence.

The angel might want to give Mom a little token of their new relationship. She might give the Mom a gift of a scripture verse, holy card, rosary or medal - even if the Mom is not Catholic. Angels will also ask if they may pray for and with her. Mom will probably be surprised at the offer, but she will also be genuinely touched by the kindness of the offer. **Our prayer for her will mean more than anything tangible we might give her and she will begin to understand that our interest in her is as a child of God. Our work is to extend the healing hand of Christ to her and allow it to touch her life. Hopefully, she may experience a brief period of grace during our meeting and we will now share a very special bond.**

We might say "The Lord's Prayer" together (non-Catholics may not recognize the prayer if you call it the "Our Father").

It is perfectly acceptable to also give Mom a small personal non-religious gift at the first meeting. The point is to put an emphasis on her personally and let her know she is thought of and cared for. She will appreciate your thoughtfulness and might find it easier to open up to you when you are spending time to help her with her needs.

See Appendix for Conversation and Listening Skills

For any difficult situations or questions that come up, be sure to contact the Gabriel Project Coordinator – David Zarri @ 925 686-9277, davidlzarri@earthlink.net

The Client Intake Form is the most important document each angel will use. All Mom's information is included in this document. At the first and all follow up interviews, the angel will record all information on the intake sheet(s). The angel must review Mom's case with the Parish Coordinator. When Mom has delivered her baby, all information must be given to the Parish Coordinator. This information is confidential and can only be used for the precise purpose of helping Mom. A copy of all intake forms must be sent to the Gabriel Project Coordinator.

Also See: ANGEL CHECKLIST in the Appendix

Assessing Mom's Needs

The Client Intake Form is very important. It will help assess Mom's needs most objectively. Moms are often in trauma and they appreciate a professional approach to their situation. The Intake Form will also serve as an icebreaker and make Mom feel that we care enough to want to be thorough when listening to her. As the angels listen to Mom, any information that has not yet been recorded on the Intake Form should be entered.

- Prioritize and list her most immediate and basic needs.
- Ask her specific questions: Is she insured? Have Medicaid? Seen a doctor? Obtained benefits (WIC, etc.)?
- Discuss with her the help she needs.
- If it is necessary to refer her to an appropriate agency, be sure to ask her to contact you again and if she doesn't, **be sure to contact her**. *You are her MENTOR.*

Remember, the angel is a mentor and friend. The Gabriel Project is *not* a referral service. Keep in contact with Mom throughout her pregnancy.

Do what you can to be informed about the agency or organization to which you refer Mom. Both you and Mom should know what to expect and not to expect from them.

Remember that when you refer Mom for prenatal care, she'll need care *throughout* her pregnancy, not merely the first two trimesters. The time to plan for her third trimester prenatal care and a hospital at which she will give birth to her child should not be long postponed.

To Do List:

- Set some goals for Mom and yourself to accomplish before the next visit.
- Allow for a reasonable time to accomplish the tasks.
- Set a time for the next visit, then call and remind her a day or two in advance. *If you do not take the initiative to contact her between visits and encourage her, you may never hear from her again.*
- Let Mom know you are there for her and that she can call you when she needs to talk.

Confidentiality

As an angel you might discover information about Mom that could be detrimental to her if known by others. Mom's knowing that you will never discuss details of her history ensures her that she can freely talk to you.

In having access to information necessary for you to do your work, you acquire the responsibility to keep it secret. You must regard this as an absolute requirement, a Sacred Trust.

When does it End?

New angels often ask: "How long should I plan on having a relationship with the Mom I am helping?" The answer is as individual as each relationship. Many of the Moms we help are having their first baby and may want some assistance and encouragement - especially as they begin their new role as mothers.

Angels are actually sometimes with their Moms during labor and delivery. After sharing that experience, it would be unnatural to just leave the relationship. There will be a very special bond between Mom and angel. **Even if circumstances separate Mom and angel by time or distance, many Moms come back to see their angels and show them the child they helped her bring into the world. If the angel knows the birth dates of Mom and baby, she can send a card to remind them that they are still being thought of and prayed for.**

See Appendix for:

- **Conversation and Listening Skills**
- **Angel Checklist**
- **Client Intake Form**
- **How to Organize a Baby Shower**

Collecting Material Resources

Parishes may choose to collect material resources on an on-going or periodic basis and store collected items for future distribution or they may choose to acquire items as needed for specific Moms and Babies (see items listed in Appendix: How to Organize a Baby Shower).

Requests for material needs should not be made to Pregnancy Resource Centers, unless you have a special relationship with that Center. They have their own clients' needs to be concerned with.

Remember that *The Gabriel Project* is a **parish-based** outreach to support pregnant women and their unborn children.

Conversation and Listening Skills

Conversation

At the root of all successful conversation is treating Mom as you would wish to be treated yourself. As caring helpers we must understand that listening is more important than talking.

Conversation can be:

- The spoken word.
- Body posture and gesture.
- Voice tone and inflection.

Of these, the most telling is voice tone and inflection, then body posture and gesture and then the spoken word, yet we often tend to put more importance on the spoken word.

In a one on one relationship, we continuously communicate whether we speak or not. The effective angel must become aware of the impact her tone of voice, inflection, body posture and gestures have on Mom. Angels must know how to evaluate non-verbal conversation from Mom to gain a better understanding of her situation.

Mom needs:

- To be dealt with as an individual rather than as a type, a category or a case.
- To express her feelings and thoughts, both negative and positive.
- To be accepted as a person of worth, with innate dignity regardless of any dependencies, weaknesses, faults or failures.
- A sympathetic understanding of and response to feelings and thoughts expressed.
- Not to be condemned for the difficulty in which she finds herself.
- To make her own choices and decisions concerning her own life. She needs help, not commands.
- To keep confidential information secret. She does not want to exchange her reputation for the help which she will receive.

A Mom in need wishes, and sometimes desperately needs, a pleasant and helpful welcome. Mom needs a good listener who will be understanding, empathetic, discreet, non-judgmental and non-patronizing.

Sympathy is required, but over identification with Mom on the Angel's part will do more harm than good. If the angel's problems are too much to the forefront, she will be unable to help Mom. The Angel must be detached from her own difficulties so she can concentrate objectively on Mom's needs.

Remember, we are here to be faithful to God and to Mom, not to guarantee results. All results are in God's loving, merciful and providential hands; the angel is His instrument.

Active Listening

Active listening is just that; choosing to listen and understand what Mom is talking about. The angel must listen at a number of levels to what is being overtly said and to what Mom is not saying. Slow down and allow Mom to express her thoughts and feelings and tell her story. If one has an attitude of unconditional love, one can listen more effectively and compassionately.

An angel should not feel obliged to come up with a solution every time Mom mentions a problem. In the initial stages of a visit, it is much more important to listen. Before Mom will hear you and pay attention to your advice, she needs to know you have heard and understood her. Only after you have a thorough understanding of Mom's situation can you help her work on solutions.

There are two ways to actively listen: Restatement & Rephrasing.

The active listener acts as a mirror or sounding board, reflecting what Mom has said without adding one's own perceptions and responses. This part of communicating focuses on the content of factual information communicated to you by the Mom.

In restatement, the angel repeats what the mom has said almost word for word. This is simple. When used properly it is very effective in helping Mom discuss her difficulties.

In rephrasing, the angel summarizes what has been said in her own words. This is very helpful if Mom has given a lot of information or is upset and incoherent. The angel can help clarify what has been said by paraphrasing the most important parts of what the mom has expressed.

It is important to use a tentative tone of voice when restating or rephrasing. This encourages the Mom to continue talking and allows her the freedom to correct any mis-perceptions of the volunteer.

Interpretive Listening

Interpretive listening enables the Angel to understand the thoughts and feelings that underlie Mom's statements. This helps Mom to understand and explore what she is really feeling in a non-threatening environment.

The angel needs to understand how Mom feels and thinks about her situation and about all the important people in her life and other relevant factors. The angel must guard against making inaccurate assumptions, and against making comments or suggestions based on those assumptions. The desire to understand Mom's feelings demonstrates that we are sincerely interested in her, not merely in her feelings about her child.

The first step in interpretive listening is listening for feelings. The angel listens carefully to the Mom's words, (including voice tone and inflection), and observes body posture and gestures to gather clues that answer the question of how she is feeling. Listening for feelings involves trying to identify what is going on below the surface of the conversation.

Asking Questions

All questions must lead to a better understanding of Mom. Learn to recognize the different types of questions and their purpose.

Closed-ended questions are answered with a yes or no. They are very good for obtaining factual information, but not information on feelings, motivation etc. However, teenage Moms especially prefer this type of question because they are easily answered without going into details.

While questions allow Mom to talk about her reasons, including moral reasons, for acting a certain way. they can also imply judgment. If Mom becomes defensive, rephrase the question another way: What caused you to. . .? What made you decide to. . .? How did you come to...?

Rapid-fire are several questions in one sentence. They confuse Mom and are a poor communication technique. Never ask more than one question at a time.

Questions containing the answer are used to state opinions rather than to gain information. The angel should never use a question to manipulate Mom into a preferred response.

Open-ended questions encourage Mom to talk about herself. They are based on something the Mom has said and are used to explore the situation in greater depth. They also provide a model for solving future problems.

Examples:

1. How do you feel about being pregnant?
2. What makes you feel that abortion is the best solution for you?
3. What were the circumstances that led up to his leaving you?

CLIENT INTAKE FORM

CLIENT NAME: _____

Date Called Helpline: _____ Church referred to: _____

Church Coordinator: _____ Angel's Name _____

Caller's Name: _____ Age: _____

Phone: _____ OK to text?: _____

Email: _____ Alt. Phone: _____

Address: _____ ZIP: _____

Dates & Times Contacted: _____

Comments (left message, no answer, call returned, etc.) _____

How did you hear about us? _____

What is the best time to call you? _____ May we leave a message? Yes No

Have you called us before? Yes No How far along are you? _____

Religion: _____ Parish/Church: _____

Insurance: Medicaid Medicare Private None

Marital Status: Married Single

Are your parents aware of your pregnancy? Yes No Are they helping? Yes No

Is the baby's father aware of your pregnancy? Yes No Is he helping? Yes No

Where is the baby's father? _____

Do you have other children? Yes No Do you have a doctor? Yes No

Are you considering abortion? Yes No Have you been to a facility? Yes No

If yes, which one? _____

NEEDS (circle all that apply): Layette car seat carrier diapers stroller crib formula

food baby clothes maternity clothes baby toiletries

Other Needs: _____

Comments: _____

_____ Continue on reverse side

ANGEL CHECKLIST

Contact Mom several days in advance to remind her of your next visit.

Review the Handbook as a refresher before visits with Mom.

Begin with a prayer each time you meet with Mom.

Inquire about doctor visits. Is she keeping current with her visits?

If there are siblings, inquire as to their wellbeing.

Inquire about her husband/family members.

Make sure Mom is in contact with her insurance provider:

- Medicaid
- Medicare
- Private
- None

Inquire about financial status. Has she been in contact with:

- WIC Benefits — Nutrition Program for Women
- Department of Human Services
- Food Stamp Program
- St. Vincent de Paul Society

Would she like to see a priest for reconciliation/healing?

Make Coordinator aware of any unusual problems or issues (talk of abortion, deep depression, abuse, serious health issues).

Remind Mom that the hospital will not release the baby unless she has a proper car seat.

Brief documentation needs to be made for every visit and conversation on the intake form or an attachment. This should be given to the Coordinator for permanent record after Mom has her baby.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A BABY SHOWER

- Consult your pastor.
- Display bulletin announcements and a flier in the two weeks coming up to the day of the shower. Consider an annual Baby Shower, for example, every Mother's Day!
- Include as many groups in the parish as possible in the preparations - the school, the CCD classes, the Knights of Colubus, etc., and give each group specific tasks to do and times to attend at the tables.
- If you have a parish school, involve the children in the baby shower. They can make posters to advertise the shower and contribute small items.
- Contact the school religious education teacher.
- Request gently used as well as new items.
- Decorate the tables with pink and blue balloons and bunting.
- Serve cake and punch after each Mass.
- Leave a crib or bassinet in a prominent place for donations.
- Provide a bowl or basket for cash donations or gift cards.

Clean used items are acceptable.

<p>Needed for Layettees:</p> <p>Crib Blankets Safe Infant Toys Socks Bottles Receiving Blankets Onesies Baby Shoes, Booties Baby Clothes (boy & girl) Sleepers Sweaters Disposable Diapers (small & medium) Gowns Hats Bibs Baby Shampoo, Powder, Baby Wash Combs, Brushes Wipes Pacifiers</p>	<p>Big Items:</p> <p>Baby Beds Mattresses Walkers Strollers Changing Tables/Mats Playpens Bathtubs Car Seats Highchairs Carriers</p>
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