



Matthew 25

*...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,
you did for me.*

The Social Ministry Commission Newsletter
of St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas

January 2010

All in Mom's Hands **Single Mothers Needing Others**

By Cara Spanel-Weber, St. Mary's student and member of SMAPL (St. Mary's Pro-Life Committee)

The pro-life position of Catholics standing up against abortion often leads to accusations of caring only about the baby, and not about the mother. As an active participant in pro-life activities, I have often been asked questions along the lines of, "What are you doing to help the single mother for the 18 years she has to take care of the baby?" And that is a very good question. As Catholics, we must help and pray for women to choose life for their child, but if we drop the ball there, we are failing them. This article briefly looks at the challenges facing single mothers and at programs designed to help them, and then touches on ways that you can help.

Single motherhood is a daunting prospect. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2008 44.9% of single mother households with children under the age of 5 are below the poverty level, compared to a poverty rate of 9.6% for all households in the US. These statistics do not come as a surprise if one considers all that is on a woman's plate in this situation. She has to find an employer that will pay her a decent income that will enable her to support herself and her children, give her health insurance benefits, and be understanding of the time she has to take off to stay home with sick kids, go to school functions, take her kids to school or daycare, and pick them up on days when she can't arrange another option. She has to pay for auto, home, and life insurance, in addition to payments and repairs for her car and home. She has to pay utility bills, taxes, and try to save money for the future. She has to handle all of this, and more, alone! Completing a college degree with all of these responsibilities is almost impossible.

The single mother has to both invest all the time it takes to care for and run a household with children, and earn a sufficient salary to pay for all the expenses of a household and children. It is laughable to think that she could do all of this without help of some sort. She needs the support of her friends and family, an understanding employer, and likely financial help from time to time. But if these resources are not readily available to her, where else can she turn for help? Are we, as Catholics, there for her in her time of need?



The majority of services for single women with infants are found through crisis pregnancy centers, government programs, and Catholic Charities. "Learn while you Earn" programs like the one at the Good Samaritan Gabriel

Project Life Center in Bryan give credits to women for attending free prenatal and parenting classes that they can redeem for items like strollers, diapers, and bassinets. Many agencies, including Good Samaritan Gabriel Project Life Center, also offer follow-up services for one to two years after the new baby is born. Catholic Charities of the Austin Diocese supports a program called Young Parents Succeed, which focuses on helping single parents aged 16-25 achieve self sufficiency. In addition to workshops and classes, the program provides access to services including food pantry, pro bono legal services, case management, individual counseling and financial assistance for rent and utilities. A Catholic Charities program in the state of Washington called Childbirth and

Parenting Alone (CAPA) matches a community volunteer with parenting experience as a mentor to a single woman with children aged three and under. Catholic Charities in New York operates the Regina Residence, which provides housing, educational and career opportunities, nutrition programs, and other services to young single mothers. These are just samples of the many programs available to single mothers through Catholic sources.

Did you know? (Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau at www.census.gov/)

- In 2006 almost 1 in every 10 households in the United States was headed by single parents.
- In 2008, 28.2% of all U.S. single mother households and 44.9% of single mother households with children under the age of 5 have incomes below the poverty level, as compared to 9.6% of all families and only 4.6% of married couple households.
- In College Station, 39.9% of single mother households have incomes below the poverty level, as compared to 14.5% for all families and only 4.7% for married couple families.

Some of the Catholic services and resources available around Central Texas:

Locally, there are not many Catholic services or programs for helping *specifically* single mothers after the first three years of their new child's life. This is, perhaps, a gap that needs to be filled because of the unique needs of a single mother. There are, however, general services for families in need, whether single mother households or not, through local churches and Catholic Charities programs:

- The Good Samaritan Gabriel Project Life Center in Bryan provides free clothing, diapers and many other items available for babies up to 12 months old. They offer many other free services, including classes for pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting, natural family planning instruction, maternity clothing, emotional and spiritual support, and referrals to other agencies including doctors and adoption agencies.
(For more info, contact 979-822-9340, gsgplc@verizon.net, www.gabrielprojectlifecenter.org)
- Annunciation Maternity Home in Georgetown offers a free home for young women (age 14 and up) who are in problem pregnancies. The home provides free long-term care until the mother and baby have a safe environment to which they can return. This includes housing, continuing education, classes on newborn care, toddler care, discipline techniques, anger management, banking, budgeting, house cleaning, cooking, and basic auto care, as well as job assistance, transportation to and from doctor/jobs, instruction on purchasing/owning vehicles, child care, spiritual development, family counseling, adoption referral, and two years of follow up after the women and their children move out of the home.
(For more info, contact 512-864-7755, 1-877-71-HAVEN, info@TheMaternityHome.org, www.thematernityhome.org)
- Our Lady of the Angels Maternity Shelter in Temple provides shelter to women in crisis pregnancies and offers a supportive environment for the mother and child as they attempt to establish themselves. Phone: 254-742-2340.
- The Catholic Charities program Young Parents Succeed, for single parents aged 16-25 in Travis County, focuses on helping young single parents achieve self sufficiency, providing free workshops, classes, and access to services including food pantry, pro bono legal services, case management, individual counseling and financial assistance for rent and utilities.
(For more info, contact 512-651-6132, 1-866-464-9494, or www.ccctx.org/service_parenting.php)
- Catholic Charities Services to Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents (SPPA) Program, for adults aged 25 and under with infants in Houston has for the goal of establishing self-sufficiency for single parents through a wide range of services like prenatal and postpartum care; comprehensive bio-psycho-social assessment, legal and financial needs; counseling and monthly support groups; monthly in-home education on prenatal, life skills, and parenting issues; in-home aftercare up to 1 year after the birth of the child; and referrals to other health and social services.
(For more info, contact 713-874-6583, 1-866-649-5862 or go to www.catholiccharities.org/en/cms/?68)

Other local resources include:

- Hope Pregnancy, a crisis pregnancy center, offers standard services and a "Learn while you earn" program for single parents. (979-695-9193; www.hopepregnancy.org; info@hopepregnancy.org)
- Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach (APO), an adoption agency, and YoungLives Ministry of Brazos Valley sponsor "The Mama Club," a faith-based environment where teen moms (pregnant and parenting) can come together for support and encouragement. Classes, activities, and friendships all focus on the needs of teenage parents and their children. (979-764-6636; www.pregnancyoutreach.org)
- WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) provides nutrition education, vouchers to buy healthy foods, support and help with breastfeeding, and referrals to healthcare programs for pregnant or breastfeeding women and children up to 5 years of age. (979-779-7443; www.bvcaa.org/wic.html)
- TAMU - Resources for Students who are Parents provides community childcare listings, babysitter listings, school information, Aggies with Kids club. (979-845-1741; stulife.tamu.edu/agoss/resources/Parents)

What can YOU do to help?

- Donate maternity and baby items to the annual KappaTheta Beta (KTB) Diaper Drive at St. Mary's Catholic Church benefiting the Good Samaritan Gabriel Project Life Center in Bryan. Items needed include diapers, baby blankets, bibs, bottles, clothes, and rattles. Look for this event in the Sunday bulletin or in the announcements.
- Volunteer at the Good Samaritan Gabriel Project Life Center in Bryan or become a "Gabriel Angel," a community volunteer that is paired with a woman throughout her crisis pregnancy up to 6 months after the birth of her child.
- Donate money to support the Annunciation Maternity Home in Georgetown, TX or to Marywood, a similar home in Austin struggling financially. (No amount is too small and you can donate online by visiting their websites: www.thematernityhome.org/ or to www.marywood.org/.) You can also attend the annual Good Samaritan Gabriel Project Life Center Benefit Dinner in the fall or give money for Social Ministries Outreach at St. Mary's with the main collection on the 4th Sunday of the month (envelopes are available on the tables in the back of the Church), which helps support the local outreach efforts of the Good Samaritan Gabriel Project Life Center, the Brazos Valley Coalition for Life, Habitat for Humanity and the St. Vincent de Paul Society.
- Pray for the women and children who are in this situation, for their material needs and their peace of heart; for more people to answer the call to serve these women and children and discern if God is calling you to serve somehow in this capacity.