

A Baby Shower

Intergenerational Service Project

Objectives

- to provide layette and nursery supplies for families in need
- to bring together girls and women to serve, build community, and pray
- to stimulate intergenerational dialogue among girls and women
- to reflect on the physical and emotional needs of mothers of all ages
- to promote respect for life in all its phases

Preparation

1. Contact an organization that works with pregnant teens and women who may face financial difficulties during their babies' early years. Make sure that the organization will accept the gifts that will be collected during the baby shower. Ask the representative for a list of specific needs. Some organizations that can provide this kind of information include the following:
 - Hospitals and medical centers—especially those that accept uninsured patients—have a social services department that provides newborn clothes for moms in need and their babies.
 - Local chapters of the Saint Vincent De Paul Society, Catholic Charities, or other charitable organizations may have thrift stores with clothing departments that cater specifically to infants.
 - Pro-life organizations like Birthright (www.birthright.org or 800-550-4900) may be able to provide you with a list of their local chapters. Birthright supports and counsels girls and women with unplanned pregnancies by working directly with mothers and providing for their needs and the needs of their babies.
2. Consider inviting someone from the organization to accept the gifts and to explain their work and the needs of those who will be receiving the gifts. If a speaker is not available, consider a video on the struggles of poor families. Your diocesan media center or Catholic social services can probably give you suggestions.
3. Invite a number of girls and women—single, married, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and friends—together for an afternoon of socializing, service, and reflection. Youth groups, Girl Scout troops, Women's Guild, or other organizations within a parish would be a good place to get started. Open the shower up to all adolescent girls and adult women of the parish.

Include in the flyer or invitation the time, place, and purpose of the shower as well as a list of suggested gifts and instructions, including

a request that the participants bring the items to the gathering unwrapped.

4. Form a committee for food and another for decorations. Include both girls and adult women on the committees. Decorations can be as simple or as elaborate as you want them to be. Ask the decoration group to provide nametags for participants.

Ask another small group of girls and women to provide supplies for baby shower games. These supplies would become their gift to the organization. (See the first suggested game below.)

5. If you prefer not to do it yourself, ask someone to facilitate the time for reflection and discussion. If the group will be larger than about twenty people, you may need more than one facilitator so that the discussion can take place in smaller groups.

On the Day of and During the Baby Shower

Setup

- Decorate the room and set up refreshments and chairs.
- Provide a central table or space in the room for shower gifts. Have symbolic items available near the space to create an atmosphere of prayer for the closing.
- Prepare for a baby shower game if it is part of your plan.

Arrival of Guests and Introductions

- Provide name tags as participants arrive.
- Gather the guests in a circle (or small circles if the group is very large). Begin with introductions that include the following information: name, why you came today, where you go to school, what grade you are in. Adult guests might share things like how long they have been in the parish, how many children (or grandchildren, godchildren, nieces, and nephews), where they work, and so on.
 - Option 1:* If the group is small or if you have extra time, ask each person to share a story told by a family member about their birth or about themselves as a baby.
 - Option 2:* Ask each guest to bring a picture of herself as a baby. As part of the introductions, give each person a picture and ask her to find the person whose picture she has.
 - Option 3:* Do the baby picture activity described above, and have the guests interview and then introduce the person portrayed in the picture to the rest of the group.

Suggested Baby Shower Games

Option 1: Lay out on a table fifteen to twenty supplies for small babies, such as baby lotion, baby shampoo, diaper pins, baby thermometer, baby wipes, pacifier, small bib, baby washcloth, baby comb or brush, rattle, jar of baby food, teething toy, small stuffed toy, nursing pads, baby bottle, nipples, spoon, cup, and so on. All of these items can later become part of the donated layette. Gather the guests around the table and invite them to look closely at the table for one minute. Then cover the items with a large cloth. Provide everyone with a paper and pencil and ask them to list as many items as they can remember. Those who are able to list the most items win a small prize, such as a ceramic angel, a book of prayers for women or girls, a live plant, or flowers from the table.

Option 2: Ask everyone to bring a picture of themselves as a baby. While people are gathering, post the pictures in a central location. Put a number by each photo. Provide each guest with a list of names of people at the shower. Tell them that their task is to write the number of the picture that corresponds to each name. The person with the most correct matches wins.

Option 3: Purchase or borrow a book that has the meanings of names. Find the meaning of the name of each guest. List the names of the guests in one column on a sheet of paper. In a second column, list the meanings of the names but in a different order. Challenge the guests to match the names with their meanings. The person who gets the most matches wins a small prize. Conclude by giving everyone a second name tag and having them write the meaning of their name on it. They should wear it near the name tag they received when they arrived.

Opening and Offering of Gifts

Because the gifts are unwrapped, you can ask each participant to explain why she chose to bring a particular item. Suggest that she begin with the sentence starter, "I offer this gift to a special baby because. . . ."

Speaker or Video

If a speaker from the organization is present, invite him or her to talk about the work of the organization, where the gifts will go, and how they will be distributed. If you chose to show a video instead, do so at this time.

Reflection: Suggested Discussion Questions

Engage the participants in a discussion around the following questions. Choose the ones that seem best suited for those attending. Add other questions, if you wish, to meet the needs and the experiences of your group. If the group is large, divide the guests into smaller groups. Be sure to mix people of different ages in the small groups.

About material needs of babies and new mothers

- Looking at the items that people brought to this shower, can you think of anything else that a new mother might need to take care of her baby?
- How are these things the same or different from the needs or supplies that women may have had one or two generations ago? Twenty to fifty years ago?
- Ask some of the older women present to describe how nurseries and layettes may have changed in their lifetime.

About lifestyle changes, emotional effect, and community support

- What are some of the problems a woman faces when she is pregnant, especially if the pregnancy is unplanned or unexpected? What are some of the feelings she may experience?
- How are these obstacles different or the same as for women of previous generations? What has changed in our society's treatment of women who are not married but find out they are expecting a child?
- New life is to be celebrated, and babies are precious. What are some of the joys and difficulties a mother might face in the first year of a child's life?
- How can we as individuals support pregnant teenagers and women before and after the birth of their babies?

- How can we as a society help support women and help them to say “yes” to life? How can governments, churches, and civic organizations each do their part?

About Mary as Mother

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a young woman of about fourteen when the angel Gabriel came to her with the invitation to be the mother of God (Luke 1:26-28). She was engaged to Joseph but not yet married.

- What kind of obstacles did Mary face when she said “yes” to the angel’s invitation? What kind of feelings do you think she may have experienced?
- How did Joseph support her during this time in her life and the life of her unborn child?
- What do you suppose were some of the material needs of babies then? What would her friends and family, like her cousin Elizabeth, have brought to a baby shower for Mary?
- What are some of the feelings Mary and Joseph experienced at the birth of Jesus? How are these feelings like those of mothers and fathers today?

Blessing of the Gifts

Conclude the baby shower with a short prayer service. Take a moment to create a prayerful setting around the table of gifts. Gather the guests in the prayer space. Invite them to speak aloud their prayers for the women and children to whom the gifts will go. Ask the entire group to respond to each petition by saying “*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*”

After all petitions have been spoken, invite everyone to stretch out their hands over the gifts in a gesture of blessing. Conclude with the following prayer:

Gracious God, Creator of all life, as a mother embraces her child, so you hold us in your arms, cradling us and breathing into us the life of your Spirit.

Jesus, our brother, you told your disciples to let the children come to you. Now we ask you to bless these gifts and the little lives they will touch. Help us to be women full of grace, as your mother Mary is. We ask you to bless all women who carry new life, especially those who face obstacles and difficulties. Remembering that each person, born and unborn, is made in your image, we pray for wisdom to recognize your face in each person we encounter, young or old, rich or poor, male or female, because we are your body, the Body of Christ. Amen.

(Created for The Voices Project by Janet Claussen, Atlanta, Georgia)

Other Ideas for Intergenerational Service Projects for Adolescent Girls and Adult Women

Any of these projects can be adapted for particular groups in the school or parish setting. Allowing an opportunity for reflection and prayer centered on the themes of the service project will make the activities more meaningful.

1. Here's a variation on the baby shower theme. Have a maternity clothes "shower." Participants can bring new or nearly new clothes for expectant mothers. Organizations like Birthright distribute these to women in need. Reflection on this project would be especially effective if a speaker from the organization would speak to the girls and women about their work supporting and counseling women who face unplanned pregnancies.
2. Plan a fund raiser and give the proceeds to a thrift store to purchase infant clothes or maternity clothes for families in need.
3. Another organization that tries to meet the special needs of women with premature babies is Newborns in Need. This national group provides patterns and instructions for making clothes for premature babies. Women with sewing machines and supplies can meet with teen girls to teach them basic sewing skills while providing a service to babies with special needs. Reflection might center on how women have traditionally passed down their skills to the next generation. Discussion that focuses on respect for life would be especially effective as participants reflect on how technology has enabled babies so tiny to survive outside the womb.
4. Plan a day near a holiday to gather teen girls and women to give a theme party for children in a shelter or a Catholic Worker house of hospitality. For the reflection aspect of this project, lead a discussion on the special needs and difficulties of families who are homeless or living in poverty.
 - What can lead to homelessness or poverty?
 - How can charitable organizations, businesses, and government agencies cooperate more effectively to address the needs of families who are poor?
 - Why are women and children who are poor especially at risk in our society? What is our Gospel call to help those who are most in need?
 - How did Jesus affirm and reach out to women and children?

5. Plan a gathering of older women and girls with an opportunity to reflect and dialogue about their faith and their relationship with God. The focus of the event would be on the gifts of wisdom that elderly women have that they can offer to the young.
 - How are our spiritual journeys alike or different, depending on our age?
 - What are some of the high and low points of life that older women can share with adolescent girls?
 - What wisdom do teens and younger women have that they can share with older women?

This would be a good opportunity to tell the stories of some of the women in biblical times and the struggles they faced.

6. Plan a “mom’s day off” by providing a free babysitting service for moms with small children, so they can spend the day doing something for themselves. You might plan a craft so that the children themselves can make something for their mother. When the mothers return to pick up their children, give each one a small gift of a prayer card on the theme of mothers to honor the spirituality of motherhood.

Reflect with the girls on the importance of taking time for oneself. While doing for others is important, mothers often do not take time to take care of their own needs. The kind of time provided by the girls’ service project is very important for mothers of young children. Discuss ways in which the whole family benefits.

7. A service project that might flow out of a classroom discussion, a youth group study, or an adult education evening on the topic of justice issues might also lead to a session for writing or e-mailing lawmakers and government officials about issues that affect women and girls, such as welfare laws, victim advocacy, domestic violence, and so forth. Organizations such as Network, a social justice lobby based in Washington, D.C. (www.Networklobby.org) is an excellent source for background information and sample letters as well as addresses of legislators on the national level. Follow-up meetings to analyze the responses from legislators or following the news accounts of pending legislation would provide long term opportunity for reflection.

8. Gathering a group of girls and women to plan an entire year of joint service projects is one way of building intergenerational relationships and may result in formal or informal mentoring between the adults and the girls.