



## **2024 OPEN YOUR HEART APPEAL FAQ'S**

### **Q. WHAT IS THE PREPARES MINISTRY?**

**A.** PREPARES (Pregnancy & Parenting Support) is a parish-based ministry designed to assist young, vulnerable families during pregnancy and the first five years of their children's lives. The bishops of Washington State initiated PREPARES in 2014 to offer ways to live out our Catholic teachings regarding the value of all human life and the preferential option for the poor. In other words, the bishops sought to "walk our talk" regarding the intrinsic connection of life and justice.

The goal is to ensure that pregnant women and families in need can obtain essential resources locally through outreach from parish volunteers. Statewide, there are currently 188 parishes actively providing this ministry, with 742 trained volunteers and Companions having assisted 14,120 vulnerable families in 2023.

### **Q. HOW ARE PARISHES INVOLVED IN THE PREPARES MINISTRY?**

**A.** Parishes are at the heart of the PREPARES ministry. At the requests of Washington's bishops, three regional Catholic Charities agencies assisted parishes statewide in setting up the ministry and training parish coordinators and other volunteers. The agencies provide in-depth training for those volunteers willing to act as Companions to families. A Companion walks with a specific pregnant woman or family, listening to them, guiding them, and helping them find needed resources.

### **Q. HOW ARE DADS INVOLVED IN PREPARES?**

**A.** Some parishes have initiated a specific fatherhood program just for dads. New fathers are invited to share concerns about their roles as fathers with parishioners who have raised or are raising their children. Fathers are valued as critically important in the lives of children and can be matched to male mentors for help in the journey of parenthood.

### **Q. IS THE PREPARES MINISTRY AVAILABLE IN THE MANY PARISHES THAT SERVE HISPANIC FAMILIES?**

**A.** Parishes with Spanish Masses offer *PREPARES en español*. Prepares trains volunteers to work in their native language to meet the needs of low-income Hispanic families. Families in farmworker communities welcome PREPARES assistance with infant/toddler clothing, diapers, food, and other support.

### **Q. WHAT KIND OF SERVICES DOES PREPARES OFFER?**

**A.** Parishes may help with drives for supplies, such as diapers, clothing, or food, or by maintaining a Children's Closet or a relationship with a local Food Bank. We never want a family to have to choose whether to buy diapers or food for their family.

PREPARES also helps families that find themselves isolated or alone by creating support groups, parenting classes, and playgroups like PLAY WITH LOVE or JUGANDO CON AMOR that foster community and opportunities for peer friendships.

Parish volunteers 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 issues of homelessness, housing, legal, mental and physical health, parenting classes, etc. can be referred to the local agency's 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, a local Catholic Charities agency, or the PREPARES website at [preparesforlife.org](http://preparesforlife.org). PREPARES staff spend many hours building connections and partnerships with local hospitals, organizations, and agencies.

### **Q. HOW CAN PARISHIONERS GET INVOLVED IN THE PREPARES MINISTRY?**

**A.** Some parishioners donate food, diapers, clothing, and other essential needs to their parishes. Others help deliver or distribute the goods that their parish has collected. Still others answer calls or maintain a space set aside as an outreach center, collecting and distributing food, diapers, wipes, clothing, and other needs of young families.

Specially trained volunteers serve as Companions matched to a mother, father, or family to walk the journey of parenthood in one-on-one engagement or as group parent educators.

Contribute to the **Open Your Heart Bishops' Appeal for PREPARES**: PREPARES always welcomes financial contributions. Every year, Washington's bishops ask the faithful to support this pro-life, pro-family ministry and contribute to the **Statewide Open Your Heart PREPARES Appeal**. Donors are urged to respond to the Appeal that they receive in the mail or to go online to donate at [PREPARESforlife.org](http://PREPARESforlife.org).

**Q. HOW HAS PREPARES MADE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES?**

**A.** Beyond the many success stories about how vulnerable families receiving the services have changed their lives, there are 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 survivalists 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."*

**FOR INFORMATION, REFERRAL, AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR AREA, CONTACT:**

<b>WESTERN WASHINGTON</b>	<b>CENTRAL WASHINGTON</b>	<b>EASTERN WASHINGTON</b>
Aleah Patulot, MSW PREPARES Program Director (206) 737-9264 prepares@ccsww.org	Syndee Saucedo Cavazos PREPARES Program Manager (509) 946-4645 prepares@catholiccharities.org	Lisa Green Director of Childbirth and Parenting Assistance & PREPARES (509) 455-4970 preparesew@cceasternwa.org