

The Sheltering Church Program

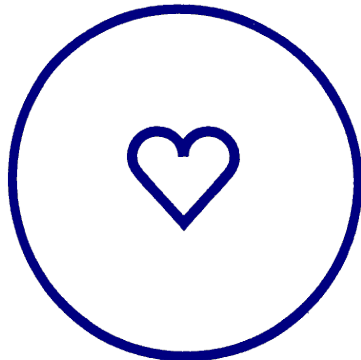
The Program's purpose is to redeem human life physically and spiritually by creating a climate of ministry to change the lives of women and men. and to protect their unborn children.

Goals of the Sheltering Church Program:

- To involve Christians to offer life to abortion-tempted women.
 - To offer women tangible help in finding a more promising alternative to abortion.
 - To make this offer of life without a price tag attached.
-

Program Features of A Sheltering Church:

crisis pregnancy



free resources

- ♥ Networks with other churches and abortion-prevention organizations to provide another doorway through which an abortion-tempted woman can receive the many resources and friends prepared to help her.
 - ♥ Attempts to draw women and men with the hope of new life, when abortion seems like the only alternative.
 - ♥ Offers a positive, practical and non-political response to abortion as a human problem.
 - ♥ Promotes its outreach by using this simple emblem to announce the free offer of life-saving resources.
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The Sheltering Church Program proclaims:

"As the family of God in an unforgiving world, we pledge our friendship and care to any woman in a crisis pregnancy, because God values her life and the human life she carries.

"Therefore, we promise to the abortion-tempted woman that through our Sheltering Church she can receive the resources she needs -- free of charge, if necessary --- to avoid abortion's spiritual, physical and emotional pain and to find a welcoming family among us.

"We extend Jesus Christ's forgiveness and healing to all who have been affected by abortion, including the biological father. As Christ's family, we joyfully receive children and affirm the goodness of adoption.

"We also pledge our time and money to support those efforts that make it possible to extend this free offer of hospitality to threatened lives."

The Sheltering Church Program responds in the spirit of Christian hospitality and love and offers life to women facing difficult pregnancies. This is more than putting a band-aid on the problem. This ministry is the church as family. It addresses people, not just the process and brings about lasting, even eternal change. We invite you to join us by filling out this form and submitting it today!

How to Become Part of the

SHELTERING CHURCH PROGRAM

**Linking Together
Local Churches & Abortion-Alternative Resources
in Partnership to Minister with
Compassionate and Practical Love to
Pregnant Women and Their Little Ones**

L_LOOK for Abortion-Alternative Resources:

- identify the agencies in your area
- call and arrange to visit them
- take time to get acquainted

I_INITIATE Relationships with these Agencies:

- get on Mailing lists and publicize information
- have occasional speakers, showers, offerings
- recruit members to work as volunteers

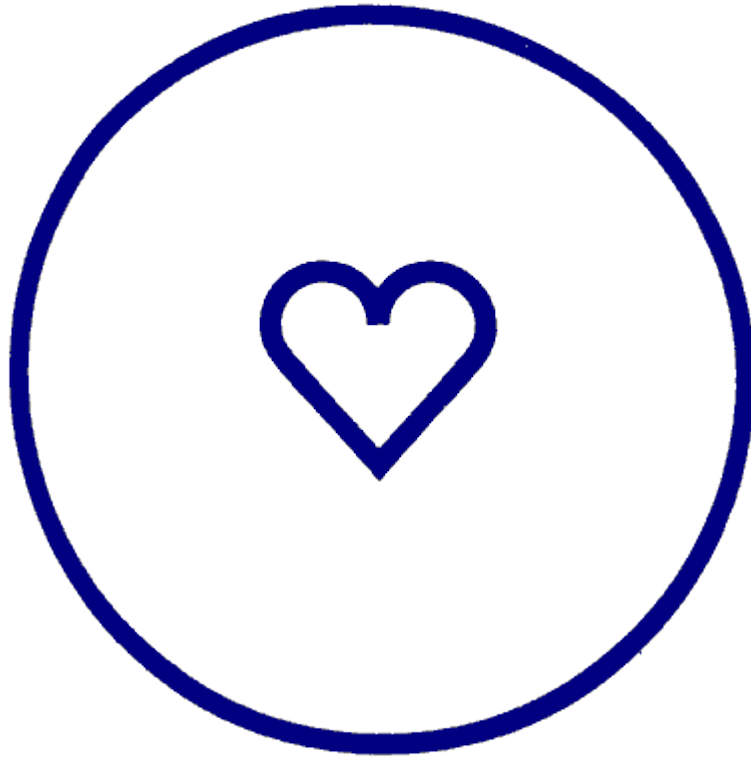
F_FIND Ways to Publicize Your Commitment:

- from the pulpit
- in bulletins and newsletters
- through Sunday School and meetings

E_EXHIBIT the Common Logo (below):

- make your commitment visible to the community
 - build increased awareness of network of churches
 - utilize other national and local resources
-

crisis pregnancy



free resources

SHELTERING CHURCH HANDBOOK

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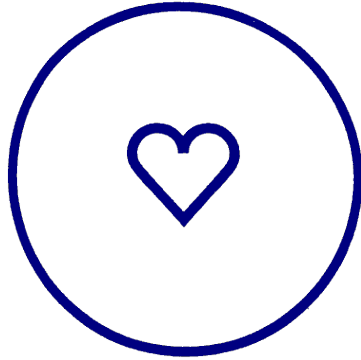
Acknowledgments

Two people were especially crucial in the conception of this project and manual--Steven Paul Wissler, founder and executive director of the [United Methodist Taskforce on Abortion and Sexuality](#), and John Cardinal O'Connor. It was Cardinal O'Connor's charitable offer to all the women of the nation to come to the New York Archdiocese if they needed assistance carrying a child to term that set me on the search for a way that other churches, without the resources of an archdiocese, might make a similar though modified offer. But it was a providential meeting with Steve Wissler that showed me a plan was already in place. Much in this manual is the direct result of Steve's foresight and vision to give every pregnant woman a viable alternative through the local church. Early drafts of the concept and description were faxed back and forth so often that neither Steve nor I could possibly unravel what belongs to who. It has been a joy to work with someone who must surely one day be recognized as one of the "pioneers" in this movement. I have simply followed his wagon.

Handbook Section A:

Establishing a Ministry for Women in Crisis

crisis pregnancy What Is a Sheltering Church?



free resources

made the pledge and have even regularly proclaimed their intentions, but they have no plan, leading to a haphazard response when a need does arise. A sheltering church will exhibit all three--a pledge, a plan, and a proclamation.

A sheltering church is one that has made a **pledge**, adopted a **plan**, and agreed to follow through with a **proclamation**. The pledge shows the church cares for the practical and spiritual needs of women facing unplanned pregnancies. The plan insures that churches will not be caught unprepared when a real need arises, which is nothing less than dangerous when abortion is the other option. The proclamation informs members and visitors of the church's willingness to help.

Many churches have informally made the pledge. If women in their congregations need assistance to see their crisis pregnancies through to their end, they will help. But they may not have made a proclamation to that effect, missing many opportunities to minister. Others may have

The Need for Sheltering Churches

In the many situations a pastor faces, ministering to a woman considering abortion is surely one of the most challenging. Few counseling situations are so urgent; hesitancy or incomplete information can result in a fatality. This is true for several reasons.

First, supporters of life offer what sounds like an unbelievably hard solution, short-term, compared with what the abortionist offers. We are asking the woman to choose a route that may provide embarrassment. If the pregnant woman is single, for instance, there may be some embarrassment when her family and friends realize that she is sexually active. Furthermore, the woman's body will be radically changed, often during a period of her life when physical attractiveness is most important. She may also be concerned over her future at school, at work, or with her relationship with the father. A pregnancy can complicate all these areas. The discovery of life within the womb can seem like a "threat" to a woman in certain difficult circumstances.

Enter the abortionist, who is able to financially profit off the woman's perceived threat. The woman is told that her problem can be taken care of on her lunch hour. Her body won't be changed. Nobody will know. The entire problem will go away. In the short term, this sounds so easy, so unbelievably simple, that it becomes a very tempting "alternative."

The long-term reality, however, presents a much different picture. Long-term, the abortionist offers only death and regret. Long-term, the church offers life and personal growth. But many people find it difficult to think "long-term" in the midst of a crisis. The tendency in a crisis is to act in ways that promote self-preservation. Crisis thinking doesn't lend itself to the leisurely ideals of sacrifice,

selflessness, and Christian commitment and obedience. Crisis thinking is usually centered around, "How can I get out of this mess?"

Women who approach the church after learning of an unplanned pregnancy need more than hope. They need assurance that the church is willing and able to help. If the church does not address the many fears and concerns a woman has, the life of the unborn child is clearly threatened. When one considers the woman's inevitable guilt over the abortion and the eventual regret, it is clear that during a crisis pregnancy the potential for evil to flourish is immense and real.

Such an urgent and potentially tragic problem requires comprehensive answers rather than "on the spot" treatment. If a church begins to think about how it will respond to a crisis pregnancy only after the pregnancy is brought to its attention, it is really playing a form of Russian roulette. The sacrifices called for on behalf of life are so great that it is vitally important to inform women of their options and reasons for choosing those options *before* they become pregnant. If the church waits until a woman is pregnant, it is already a step behind, as the woman and/or couple will have slipped into a "crisis mode" form of thinking, seeking a quick solution to an unwanted situation.

To make matters even more difficult for the pastor, the abortion problem rarely occurs in a vacuum. It is often a symptom of other, underlying needs. Crisis pregnancies are frequently accompanied by troubled or improper relationships, family tensions, sexual immorality, and the like. The woman is sometimes abandoned by the father of the child, whose willingness to address the problem may be limited to paying for half of an abortion. Interruption of school and career, family upheaval, embarrassment, and financial hardship can all make an already difficult counseling encounter perilous.

Many pastors can provide adequate spiritual counsel, but a woman facing a crisis pregnancy needs more than spiritual counsel. In the great tradition of historical Christianity and the full Gospel (James 1:27), the local church should stand ready with *many* practical options that will enable a woman to carry her baby to term and make appropriate decisions for her future.

If the church can't or won't provide a better option almost immediately, another life may be lost to the violence of abortion, and another mother will have to be healed of post-abortion trauma.

A Faithful Approach

The sheltering church concept is rooted in the desire to provide a biblically based, faith-filled approach to the abortion problem. The sheltering church concept unites Christians as they follow the example of the early Church. Though living in a pagan empire that casually practiced abortion and often abandoned children (usually to slavery, prostitution, or death), the early Church provided refuge for unwanted little ones and their parents.

Early Christian documents show not only the Church's firm opposition to the sin of abortion in its moral teaching, but also the Christian imperative to rescue abandoned children. Orphanages and foundling homes were established throughout the Christian world in the fourth century, becoming visible symbols of Christian compassion for unwanted children.

In continuity with past Christian practice, the sheltering church movement seeks to offer life to women facing difficult pregnancies, and to make this offer of life out of Christian hospitality and love without a price tag attached. This is in sharp contrast to the costly choice of abortion (usually cash only, and almost always up-front) being offered to women in our culture.

Because this help is offered through the church and not through a social service agency, the entire situation can be addressed. The church can call the father of the child to act responsibly; if relevant, the church can offer the couple forgiveness, while exhorting them to live a life of sexual purity; the church can approach the woman's employer, so that the woman need not fear losing her livelihood; the church can bring reconciliation between a daughter and her parents, to preserve and strengthen the familial bond; the church can advise the woman and the father of the child as they make vital decisions about the future.

The church is uniquely gifted to address the problem of abortion in such a comprehensive way. This is more than putting a band-aid on the problem. It goes beyond simply putting a padlock on the abortion clinic door. The sheltering church movement addresses people, not just the process, and thereby brings about lasting, even eternal change.

The Benefits of Being a Sheltering Church

The sheltering church movement helps individual churches cut through the complexities presented by abortion. Pastors need not fear a difficult counseling situation with a woman facing an unwanted pregnancy because by becoming a sheltering church, congregations will have everything in place to provide practical, biblical alternatives under their own oversight.

If your church has limited resources, the sheltering church movement in your area enables you to network with agencies that can provide what you cannot. Your church can still confidently offer practical help and comprehensive resources to any woman in your community who needs help facing a crisis pregnancy.

By becoming a sheltering church, your congregation becomes a doorway through which women and men may enter to find the hope of new life when death seems the only way to resolve a crisis pregnancy. The sheltering church is evangelism at its finest when it's needed most.

Most would agree that when a couple faces a crisis pregnancy, the local church is the first place they and their families should turn. However, many young people will not turn to the church since they believe the church is more interested in saying "no" to abortion than in providing help in unintended pregnancies. Yet the church is God's vehicle to carry the healing power and love of Jesus Christ to a couple that has sinned or is in great need. If the sheltering church movement is successful, the local church will be the first place a woman or couple facing a crisis pregnancy will turn to.

The Aspects of a Sheltering Church

In essence, a sheltering church is simply a church that has agreed to make a pledge to its own congregation and/or the local community, has developed a plan of action to ensure that the pledge can be fulfilled, and is willing to proclaim, on a regular basis, the availability of its ministry. A logo and a free offer contribute additional elements.

1. The Pledge

The sheltering church agrees to treat a crisis pregnancy as its concern, not just the woman's or couple's problem. The sheltering church agrees to provide counsel and provision, meeting the woman's needs so that she can carry her child to term. This pledge does not obligate the church to remove all the consequences from people who have made irresponsible decisions. However, with proper oversight and tough, biblical love rooted in grace, a God-honoring solution and response to abortion and unplanned pregnancies can be found. The church is simply pledging to respond in a manner consistent with true, biblical love (James 1:27). At first, this pledge may be made solely to the congregation. In time, and possibly in cooperation with other local churches, the pledge can be made to the entire community, testifying to the powerful message of reconciliation and love in Jesus' name.

2. The Proclamation

A non-doctrinal proclamation from the pulpit, and in Sunday School and confirmation classrooms, informs the congregation and community of what the sheltering church offers and why. The following proclamation is a model suggestion, but local congregations may choose to alter it as they see fit: *"As the family of God, we are committed to helping women in our church and community avoid abortion. Therefore, we proclaim to all women vulnerable to this violent experience that through our sheltering church they can receive the resources they need to avoid the violence of abortion--Free of charge if necessary. Where the spiritual and physical destruction of abortion has occurred, we extend Jesus Christ's forgiveness and healing to all men and women involved who have truly repented. We call upon men to support women in childbearing and to be united in marriage for parenting. Likewise, we encourage adoption. We commit our church to be a family to those without mother or father, wife or husband, and we win support with time and money those efforts that make it possible to extend the free offer of life."*

3. The Plan

The danger of an unprepared, "we'll deal with it as it arises" approach to abortion counseling has already been mentioned. The importance of written plans cannot be stressed too much. Anyone answering the church phones should know exactly what to say and what to do if a call comes in from a woman or couple facing an unplanned pregnancy. It is one thing for the pastor to handle a crisis call, but is the church secretary prepared? The entire ministry process, beginning with a phone call or word of mouth referral, should be thought out ahead of time and written down so that every participant knows his/her role.

4. The Consistent Logo

A logo is displayed (preferably on church signboards, the church building, a prominent window, and/or the church bulletin) creating awareness of the church's commitment to helping women face crisis pregnancies. The logo is used nationally, creating greater awareness of the church's commitment and therefore greater use of the church's offer.

5. The Free Offer

The free offer of life-saving resources is not only a part of the Christian Church's historic witness to

abandoned children, but it has the practical appeal of being a better deal than that offered by abortionists. By making this free offer, the church is signifying its willingness to sacrifice with the couple while encouraging them to make biblically responsible choices. To provide many of the free offers, the church will simply need to serve as a conduit, bringing needy women to services and organizations that are already equipped and eager to serve.

Other aspects of being a sheltering church may include the following:

6. Locally Developed Resource Flyer

The flyer identifies abortion alternative service providers (such as crisis pregnancy centers and maternity homes) in a particular sheltering church's area. This will aid the pastor and the lay committee as they make various referrals.

7. Nationally Maintained, Ongoing Information Links Designed to Solve Problems and Provide New Solutions

Sheltering churches can receive a newsletter on events and developments within the sheltering church movement by writing to the Christian Action Council, 101 W. Broad St., Suite 500, Falls Church, VA 22646. By registering its interest in receiving the newsletter, the church is not in any way affiliating with the CAC. Future plans call for a national lifeline to help answer questions and handle urgent referrals.

Becoming a Sheltering Church

Step One: Develop a resource guide

(Note: This may already have been done by a church or crisis pregnancy center in your area. you are encouraged to contact the Christian Action Council first, or other pastors in your area, to determine if a listing is already available.)

List the resources that are already available in your community. You can begin by first scanning the yellow pages--look under abortion alternatives, clinics, or pregnancy counseling. Call up those centers and ministries listed, and ask them if they know of any other organizations providing alternatives to women facing crisis pregnancies. After scanning the yellow pages, work by referral. Every time you get a name, ask the new party for additional names.

The Christian Action Council has a community survey that you can use (suggested donation is \$3) to make sure you ask yourself the right questions and cover every possible resource. In general, the survey mentions parachurch organizations, churches, clinics, childbirth classes, food banks, governmental agencies, and many other helps. Without an exhaustive listing, you might miss some very helpful allies.

In addition to going through the community survey, it will be helpful to visit the local crisis pregnancy center so that you can fully understand the extent of the resources that it offers. Interview the director and find out what is available, and what is lacking. The CPC (Crisis Pregnancy Center) will likely serve as the cornerstone of your sheltering church ministry. Rather than offer identical services, the church can provide for many needs through the CPC.

After you have completed your own local search, contact other national ministries (listed below) to determine if they have chapters in your hometown. Follow up on these leads and again, ask for more referrals. Continue to build your list of possible resources.

Ministries that offer help to women:

<p>Christian Action Council 101 W. Broad St. Suite 500 Falls Church, VA 22046 (703) 237-2100</p>	<p>Bethany Christian Services 901 Eastern Ave. NE Grand Rapids, MI 49503 (616) 459-6273</p>
<p>Birthright International 686 N. Broad St. Woodbury, NJ 08096 (609) 848-1818</p>	<p>The Nurturing Network 910 Main St., Suite 360 P.O. Box 2050 Boise, ID 83701 (208) 344-7200</p>
<p>Christian Adoption and Family Services 2121 W. Crescent Ave. Suite E Anaheim, CA 92801 (213) 860-3766, (714) 533-4302</p>	<p>Women Exploited By Abortion Rt. 1 Box 821 Venus, TX 76084 (214) 366-3600</p>
<p>Loving and Caring 1817 Olde Homestead Lane Suite H Lancaster, PA 17601 (717) 293-3230</p>	

You can purchase a listing of local pro-life groups in the-United States and Canada from International Life Services, 2606 ½ West 8th St., Los Angeles, CA 90057, (213) 382-2156.

Other national organizations that may be able to help you locate resources and/or individuals:

<p>American Life League P.O. Box 1350 Stafford, VA 22554 (703) 659-4171</p>	<p>National Right to Life Committee 419 7th St. NW, Suite 500 Washington, DC 20004 (202) 626-8800</p>
<p>Center for Bio-Ethical Reform P.O. Box 2483 Corona, CA 91718 (714) 632-7520</p>	<p>Please Let Me Live 3209 Colusa HWY Yuba City, CA 95993 (916) 671-5500</p>
<p>Alliance for Life B1-90 Garry St. Winnipeg, MB R3C 4H1 Canada</p>	<p>Operation Rescue P.O. Box 1180 Binghamton, NY 13902</p>

(204) 942-4772

We strongly recommend that you use the Christian Action Council's community resource survey to divide up the task of research. Each section in the survey can be assigned to a different individual so that no one gets overloaded trying to do too much. If your community has a CAC-affiliated CPC or local chapter, this survey has already been done, but it might be worth your time to update it.

Step Two: Determine what necessary resources don't exist

Your community may not have everything your church needs to provide comprehensive services. For instance, if the community doesn't have a crisis pregnancy center where women can get free pregnancy tests and other vital services, you'll want to commission some individuals to contact the Christian Action Council to get one started. You are much better off having a parachurch organization take care of such needs than trying to provide pregnancy tests through your congregation. Crisis pregnancy centers become the "backbone" of alternative ministries and are absolutely vital for churches to carry out their pledge. To start a CPC, contact the Christian Action Council.

Review the [checklist](#) of this guide. Check off those resources that aren't available within your community. Cooperating congregations can delegate or divide up the development of these missing services.

Note: Sheltering churches will be much more effective if they will work together to create a community that can actively and comprehensively care for women and couples facing unwanted pregnancies. For instance, one church might focus on getting a CPC started. A neighboring congregation would then be free to focus on developing a maternity home. Yet another could specialize in post-abortion counseling. By cooperating with other congregations, even very small churches can offer comprehensive ministry and care.

Step Three: Recruit professionals to volunteer their services for free

Encourage Christian doctors, lawyers, counselors, business people, and entrepreneurs to volunteer a set amount of time to service the sheltering church network. A doctor, for instance, might be willing to take on one free appointment every other week. A lawyer could donate three hours a month. Carpenters may be willing to devote some time to work on women's houses. Store owners could donate needed goods and food. If you can sign up several doctors and lawyers, for instance, each one may be called on no more (or even less) than once a month. Almost any professional should be able to handle that.

Step Four: Visit each resource to which you may refer people

It is important to personally verify the services listed by an agency if you intend to refer women to that agency or ministry. Send someone to interview the director or a high-level volunteer. Make sure you can cooperate with their philosophy of ministry. If they list a service, make sure it is offered to your satisfaction.

Step Five: Establish a review committee

Either within your congregation or in conjunction with other congregations, establish a committee that will meet periodically (bimonthly or quarterly) to review the services being offered, to address any

additional needs that have arisen, and to give general oversight to the project.

Step Six: Develop a plan of action

Now that all the pieces are together, develop a plan of action. Write out fictional accounts of women contacting the church, either over the phone (plan A), after church (plan B), or through another church member (plan C). Using the real names of individuals who will be involved in the ministry aspect, describe how the call will be handled, who will be called upon and when, what that person should do, how and when they will approach the crisis pregnancy center, how information will be shared with (or kept confidential from) the congregation, and other particulars.

When the church is contacted, the pregnant woman should immediately feel confident that the church knows what it is doing. This can be accomplished only if the church has prepared a specific plan of action ahead of time. The woman should leave with more than hope--she needs assurance that her problem has been prepared for and that there is nothing the church can't handle. This will keep her from seeking counsel at an abortion clinic that has a financial interest in this woman's problem.

Step Seven: Adopt a proclamation and use the logo

Using the proclamation on page four as a beginning point, develop a statement that will be read from the pulpit and carried in the church bulletin at least four times a year (the church may decide to print it in the bulletin every week). You will need to decide whether your pledge is to your entire community, or simply your local congregation.

After your pledge is prepared, determine where you will place the logo--on the church signboard (if making the pledge to the community, this is important, especially if several churches are involved), a church window, newspaper or yellow page ads, bumper stickers, and/or the church bulletin.

Step Eight: Educate your congregation (and possibly the community) on what is about to take place

Explain the logo and proclamation to your church members. Take a few moments and explain how your church is ready and equipped to meet this important need. Explain why your church is offering this ministry, and what you hope to accomplish. Encourage them to use this as an outreach, but also as a ministry to those within the church.

In addition to advertising the offer through church members, you may want to place an ad in a local paper, or even solicit an interview from a sympathetic reporter. The type of advertisement you do will depend in part upon whether you want to emphasize this as an outreach, making the offer to all women in your community, or whether you would prefer to work just through church members.

It is recommended that once you make the pledge, the proclamation should be repeated at least four times a year. The reason for this is to remind church members and inform newcomers that your congregation stands ready to help with practical and spiritual needs. Also, repetition increases the opportunity of making this offer directly to a woman who has just discovered, or is about to discover, that she is pregnant. Anticipating pregnancies is part of the proactive agenda of the sheltering church movement.

Step Nine: Register as a Sheltering Church

A [form](#) (also in the back of this manual) can be completed and returned to the Sheltering Church Program. In time, you will receive regular newsletters keeping you up to date on sheltering church ministries. By registering, you are also enabling the SCM to serve as a network conduit, bringing together Christians and churches who are working for the same ends in the same community.

Step Ten: Give back

The local CPC will soon become a crucial ally in your ministry to pregnant women. These local centers often work on extremely tight budgets. Consider adopting a "3 percent pledge." That is, 3 percent of your church members will volunteer with the local CPC, or in a direct role as a liaison between the CPC and your church. Also consider increasing your monthly financial support so that the CPC can continue to minister with you to women facing unplanned pregnancies.

Checklist: Basic Needs

Ideally, the Sheltering Churches in your area will have access to the following services:

1. Effective Counseling

Either the pastor or a trained layperson within the congregation should be specially equipped to handle a crisis pregnancy. A crisis pregnancy is urgent and has specific problems not found in other counseling situations. Because of this it is necessary to have at least one or two individuals (and preferably three or four) who are qualified and trained to counsel in this specific situation. If your area has a CPC, much of the counseling can take place there, but you will still need to train some individuals who will first talk with the woman and then bring her to the CPC. Every person who will have direct contact with the pregnant women should go through CPC volunteer training.

In addition to basic counseling, the woman may require help in approaching her:

- Employer
- Family
- School
- The boyfriend and/or father of the child
- The youth group/congregation

The woman should not be left alone in these cases of difficult communication.

2. Pregnancy Testing

If a woman just suspects that she is pregnant, a pregnancy test is called for. This type of work is best handled through a local CPC. Again, a lay person from the church should accompany the woman to the CPC and await the results with her, provided this is what the woman wants.

3. Maternity Homes/Sheltering Homes

Some women may require short-term or long-term housing. The two options are maternity homes and sheltering homes. A maternity home houses several pregnant women with one couple in-charge. A sheltering home is a home in which a family or married couple invites one pregnant woman to live with them. Both options service different needs, but both require training. (Loving and Caring provides excellent information on maternity homes and sheltering homes. Their address is listed on page 9.)

4. Practical Needs

The woman may also require help with food, maternity clothing, and baby items. These can be provided on an as-needed basis. It is usually preferable for churches to support the local CPC's clothing bank rather than set up separate banks of their own (but if a church uses a CPC's services regularly, it should make sure it does not deplete the CPC resources without replenishing them).

5. Instruction

Helpful instruction will include childbirth classes, parenting classes, and Bible training. Women will need help getting through the birth and then need practical parenting skills if they choose to keep their babies. Of course, practical Bible training will become essential as they begin new families and, hopefully, new lives of faith. Bible training may be done through existing adult Sunday School programs; parenting and childbirth classes are often sponsored by local CPCs. (Incentive programs have been developed to encourage women to receive Bible training and lifestyle counseling, which becomes essential to parenting a child and living a new life of faith. Contact the CAC for more information.)

6. Professional Resources

Certain needs may, in some instances, require the attention of volunteer professionals. Physicians can be urged to volunteer one free appointment every other week, or perhaps one hour per week. Lawyers and other professionals can contribute as well. Professional opportunities may include physical examinations, psychological care, and vocational counseling. If the child -was conceived out of wedlock, an obvious need for pastoral care exists. Lawyers can help with adoption or foster placement. If enough doctors cannot volunteer their time, even after being personally approached by their pastor, the church may want to consider reimbursing a doctor (perhaps on a cost-reduced basis) out of church funds.

(Note: The free offer is important, but it should not be understood as unconditional welfare. In many cases, perhaps most, the parents of the pregnant woman will want to help out and/or pay for the entire cost. Other single women, no longer living with their parents, may simply need care and concern, not free resources. But for those who are truly in need, the free offer is important.)

Handbook Section B:

Ministry for Women After Crisis

Ministries to Mothers

A potential criticism of the sheltering church movement is that churches are concerned with children only from conception until birth. This is certainly not true, but it is often how outsiders perceive ministers and ministries that affirm life. The misunderstanding no doubt arises from the church's mission, which can seem contradictory to the uninitiated. The church is charged not only with providing ministry, but also with speaking the truth--including the truth that God's ideal plan is for a man and woman to get married before they engage in sexual relations and bear children. Any time this ideal plan is violated, greater stress will result.

The church cannot remove this stress completely. People who walk outside of God's perfect plan will bear the consequences of that behavior. However, the church can seek to show compassion and forgiveness, as Christ showed compassion to the woman at the well. Christ didn't wipe out the painful consequences of the woman's sinful past, but he did, through ministry, seek to make those consequences a little easier to bear.

Therefore, while not condoning the behavior that leads to a less than ideal situation, a church can and should provide ministry alternatives to pregnant women that supports mothers not only through birth, but past birth into single parenthood. Such a ministry provides the church with the opportunity to show the mercy and grace inherent in the Gospel, leading to repentance, forgiveness, and eternal life. By using the skills and abilities of its members, the church can provide comprehensive and practical care for women who have given birth and still need some assistance.

A few may object that this ministry will increase single parenthood, but we believe it will do so only to the extent that ministry to alcoholics would increase alcoholism, or ministry to gossips would increase gossip--in other words, not at all. The church serves women in two ways: By fearlessly preaching the truth that God's word and plan, including His plan for our sexuality, should be followed and obeyed; and by providing ministry and grace leading to repentance and restoration when Christians among us fail and when non-Christians come to the truth. Both aspects of care are essential to a well-rounded ministry.

It could be argued that ministry to single mothers will encourage more people to live according to God's ideal plan. When Christians see first-hand the struggles of raising children on one's own, they may think twice before they engage in behavior that could place them in a similar situation.

The following ministries are offered as suggestions. If your church has used some others, please write out a description and send it to the Christian Action Council. We would be delighted to pass the idea along.

Parking Lot Mechanics

One of the greatest burdens for single mothers is the upkeep and maintenance of automobiles. The automobile has become an expensive necessity in many communities. Not only is it difficult for many single mothers to save sufficient funds to buy an automobile, it is also difficult for them to pay for costly repairs. Frequently, the single mother will go into debt when she buys the car, and then into further debt when the car needs to be repaired. Indeed, automobile repairs are often the most frequent contributor to credit card debt. A tight, one income budget often has no room for unexpected and costly repairs.

The church can meet this need with a minimum amount of time expended and virtually no dollar cost. The greatest expense in automobile repair is almost always the labor. By encouraging twelve volunteers to take part in this ministry, each one agreeing to give up just four Saturdays a year, the church can provide a monthly "car clinic" with four mechanics where single mothers can get their cars repaired for free, paying only for the automobile parts that need to be replaced. These volunteers need not be professional mechanics. Nobody should do work of which they are unsure, but many people can perform the basic auto care that would be required in most instances, leaving the more technical repairs to the few in~the church who are most highly trained.

How It works

Once a month, several volunteers from the church meet in the church parking lot on a Saturday morning. Single mothers bring in their vehicles and get them worked on for free-- all the mothers pay for is automobile parts. (Through a deacons' or benevolence fund, the church may opt to pay for some car parts; however, it is usually the labor that makes bills so high and inaccessible for single mothers.)

Some of the work may be simple maintenance, such as changing the oil, replacing the spark plugs, or performing a tune-up. Major work should be done by appointment, perhaps at a member's garage where the necessary tools would be more readily available.

While the mothers have their cars worked on, the church has many opportunities for ministry. This is an excellent time to hold a single mothers' support group, where single mothers can pray and encourage one another while their cars are being worked on. Old Vacation Bible School materials can be pulled out of storage to keep the children occupied in another room. If the church is making the offer to women outside of the church, evangelistic Christian videos or Bible studies can be used.

A Possible "Payment" Plan

As a "payment" for this service, the church may want to require women who are not official members to attend at least three church services. The following pledge card can be used to convey this message. (The church may opt to use language that encourages attendance rather than requires attendance.)

First Church Car Repair Ministry

We realize, however, that single mothers need more than physical care. You

also need; spiritual sustenance. Raising a family requires great wisdom, encouragement, support, and advice. Our church stands ready to provide not only physical needs, but spiritual care as well because we believe spiritual care is as vital a need as any other.

Therefore, we ask that each woman getting her car worked on agree to attend at least three worship services within the next five to six week. Of course, we hope that you will decide to become a part of our body and worship with us regularly. A three-week introduction should be enough to acquaint you with our ministry and make you familiar with the advantages of raising a family with the support of a Christian church.

By signing below, you agree that you will attend at least three church services in the next five to six weeks. No financial liability for the car repairs, of course, will ever be entailed should you break this pledge; we are simply asking you to commit to this for your own spiritual enrichment.

Name : _____

Date _____

Necessary Personnel

If just twelve volunteers signed up for this ministry, they would need to work just four days a year to perform a vital service to the single women in their congregation. Twelve members, each working four Saturdays *a year*, would provide four mechanics once a month-- all at little sacrifice and no financial obligation. If only eight church members sign up, just six days a year commitment would be required.

Those who are unable to perform mechanical work can still participate by being available to drive to the auto-parts store to purchase parts, or to shuttle the mothers back and forth from the church to their homes; to provide lunches and drinks for those doing the work; and to help with general clean-up and administration, leaving the mechanics free to work. If the church chooses to provide the additional services mentioned earlier, group leaders and children's teachers would be required.

A Vital Free Service

Without incurring any financial obligation, the church can provide a vital service to single mothers. The minimal commitment of four Saturdays a year should make it easier to recruit mechanics. It's very likely that some mechanics will want to volunteer much more often than this. They can also train those who are willing to work but need experience to be of much help.

The beauty of this ministry is that professional or amateur mechanics can play a vital role in the pro-life movement without carrying a picket sign or marching in protest. Simply by using the skills that God has given them, and for just four Saturdays a year, they can make it easier for a woman to choose life for her unborn baby.

Mom 's Night Out

This is another program that requires little or no expense, only time and volunteers. A Mom's Night Out Outreach makes available a basic children's Sunday School ministry format when single mothers can use it most--a workday evening.

Format

One night a week, or perhaps one night a month (depending on church resources), the church opens up its building to single mothers who need a night off. The children are divided into traditional Sunday School age groupings, and the mothers are free for two hours. If enough adults aren't available to hold Sunday School, a Bible video or puppet show can keep large groups busy for the two hours necessary. The church may also choose to organize activities such as Awana, Pioneer Girls, or other youth programs that would fit within this time frame.

The hours can be arranged according to the community, but it is usually better to go earlier rather than later, especially if many young children arrive. The preferred time period would be 6:00 to 8:00 PM.

Guys' Groups and Big Brothers

One of the most frequent struggles expressed by single mothers is that their male children lack an adult, male role model. There are two ways to meet this need. The first is to organize a "big brother" program on a church-wide basis, encouraging men in the church to "adopt" boys of single mothers, taking them out once or twice a month. This is a rather informal, one to one approach that requires little church administrative time (except for a very careful screening).

Another option is to organize regular "Guys' Groups." These are times when just the men of the church get together, and younger boys are welcome. The activities could span the spectrum of church yardwork parties to group attendance at a baseball game. The idea is to provide opportunities for young boys to see Christian men in action. The group format allows greater opportunities for men to bring their own sons, and to provide a collegial, group atmosphere. Depending on the size of the church, "Guys' Groups" can be divided into certain age categories, such as elementary school age, young adolescents, and older teens. Youth groups and Sunday School classes can meet many of these age needs, but Guys' Groups provide a powerful reinforcement for young males.