



CONGREGATIONAL **HOUSE** OF **REFUGE**

PROGRAM GUIDE



LUTHERANS
FOR LIFE



Lutherans For Life's mission is equipping
Lutherans and their neighbors to be
Gospel-motivated voices For Life.

CONGREGATIONAL
HOUSE
OF
REFUGE

The Congregational House of Refuge program
assists congregations to equip their
members and neighbors to prevent abortions,
provide healing for those affected by previous
abortions, and protect the unborn and the
vulnerable in their community.

HOW TO BECOME A CONGREGATIONAL HOUSE OF REFUGE

The Congregational House of Refuge represents a Gospel-motivated witness and service For Life. A congregation commits publicly and lovingly to support its members and neighbors experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. This formal designation makes churches a refuge for those experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, where they feel safe to receive the delights that come with carrying and caring for a child.

HOW DOES A CONGREGATION DECLARE ITSELF A CONGREGATIONAL HOUSE OF REFUGE?

1. The pastor becomes aware of the Congregational House of Refuge concept and statement.
2. The pastor contacts Lutherans For Life's Volunteer Relations with questions (lutheransforlife.org/volunteer-relations).
3. The congregation leaders study the Congregational House of Refuge statement to determine receptivity and readiness.
4. The congregational leaders assemble the congregation, orient the membership to the program, and invite the body's formal endorsement.
5. The pastor submits the Congregational House of Refuge agreement at this link: lutheransforlife.org/congregational-house-of-refuge. This agreement will add the church to the LFL online locator.
6. The pastor identifies and appoints a Congregational House of Refuge representative.
7. The representative facilitates the development of a congregational response plan.
8. The pastor deploys the statement by public reading, printing in parish communications, and posting in prominent locations.
9. The representative publicizes the congregation's designation to relevant community entities, e.g., hospitals, obstetricians, pregnancy resource centers, and other congregations.
10. The congregation considers expanding their life ministry by developing a Life Team or Life Advocate. Contact Lutherans For Life Volunteer Relations for more details.

HOW TO USE THE CONGREGATIONAL HOUSE OF REFUGE STATEMENT

The Congregational House of Refuge publicly declares safety and support for unplanned pregnancies. Giving voice to the statement embodies this commitment. Formal, corporate, and open declaration of the statement serves several purposes:

- Inculcates an environment that affirms the sanctity of every human life.
- Communicates unity, attentiveness, and hospitality.
- Corrects misconceptions about how Christians regard and respond to persons who experience surprise pregnancies.
- Encourages collective consideration and conversation concerning matters of sexuality, procreation, marriage, and family.
- Inculcates young people against the tendency to feel ashamed, afraid, or abandoned and withdraw in despair when encountering crisis.
- Propagates the assembly's reputation for courage and compassion.
- Enters gently into advocacy and servanthood regarding life issues.

So while it certainly speaks to the community and the culture, the statement's primary audience consists of the congregation's own membership and participants.

These aspirations represent priorities drawn from Holy Scriptures:

- Human life begins in the womb (Psalm 139:13-15; Luke 1:41-44).
- Every child comes as a gift and a blessing (Psalm 127:3; Hebrews 2:13).
- God involves Himself intimately and determinatively in procreation and gestation (Genesis 30:22-23; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- Pregnancy never constitutes sin or punishment (Genesis 4:1; 1 Samuel 2:21).
- Christians cannot recommend or condone abortion (Psalm 106:37-38; Luke 18:15-16).
- The Gospel extends care for neighbors' material needs (Matthew 25:40; James 2:15-17).
- Ridicule and rumormongering never make for wholesome or effective conduct (Romans 1:29-31; Ephesians 4:29-31).
- The Church equips men and holds them accountable as husbands and fathers (Titus 2:6; Ephesians 5:28, 6:4).
- Adoption's burden and blessings belong to the whole Body of Christ (Psalm 68:5-6; Romans 8:15).
- His forgiveness reaches, relieves, and heals even abortion guilt and grief (Luke 23:34; John 8:10-11).

Pastors and parishes may adjust the statement as best suits their considerations. Any revisions to the statement should reference all of the foregoing elements with a Gospel motivation.

Many factors can complicate pregnancy. The sentiments of this statement relate to more than unintended, underage, or unwed circumstances. The Congregational House of Refuge congregation stands ready to embrace any individual or couple whose childbearing encounters significant or unanticipated difficulties, e.g. sexual assault, adverse diagnosis, or absence of family.

Congregational House of Refuge congregations have a public reading of the statement at least twice a year. It works best when done by the pastor at a regular worship service such as:

- Christmas Eve and /or Christmas Day (December 24/25)
- The Commemoration of the Holy Innocents (December 28)
- Sanctity of Human Life Sunday (January)
- The Festival of the Annunciation (March 25)
- Mother's Day (May) and Father's Day (June)
- National Children's Day (June)
- Back to School (August)
- National Day of Remembrance for Aborted Children (September)
- National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day (October)
- National Adoption Day (November)

Finally, the congregation will want to print the statement in their main publications. The statement will also provide the greatest benefit when it appears posted in prominent facility locations. Possibilities include:

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|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| • Service folders | • Entryways and foyers |
| • Pew cards | • Narthex |
| • Bulletin boards | • Commons |
| • Weekly announcements | • Welcome center |
| • Monthly newsletters | • Nursery walls |
| • Website and /or social media | • Bathroom stalls |
| • Library or literature display | |

CONGREGATIONAL HOUSE OF REFUGE STATEMENT

Our congregation is publicly designated as a Congregational House of Refuge. We pledge ourselves as a place of safety and support for anybody experiencing an unplanned pregnancy.

We believe that every child – no matter what age or origin, appearance or ability – comes as a gift from Almighty God Himself.

- We believe that pregnancy is not a sin and that carrying a baby is not a punishment.
- We believe in receiving and loving not only these little ones but also their mothers and fathers and families.

As a Congregational House of Refuge, we pledge not to endorse or advise abortion.

- We pledge not to gossip about you, ridicule, belittle, or abandon you in your pregnancy.
- We pledge not to tolerate any members of this assembly hurting you with comments or conduct contrary to God's truth and Christ's love given in His own holy Word.

As a Congregational House of Refuge, we promise to surround you with encouragement and assistance.

- We promise to unite our collective efforts to walk with you every step of the way, helping you carry and care for your child both before and after birth.
- We promise to empower and encourage men to become loving fathers who protect women and children to faithfully fulfill their God-given vocations as fathers and husbands.
- We promise to support and accompany you if compassion and courage for your child draws you toward the choice of adoption.

And as a Congregational House of Refuge, we rejoice that the grace of God redeems even our difficulties.

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ extends also to abortions anyone may have already undergone.
- If you are suffering grief or guilt over an abortion, please hear that our Heavenly Father loves your life as much as the one that was lost, and our Savior was crucified and has risen for this sin as well.
- The Lord beholds and forgives your repentant heart, and you may go forth in peace.
- We stand ready to connect with further spiritual care and resources to bring about complete relief, healing, and freedom.

WORD OF HOPE

There Is Hope for Healing

Word of Hope, a ministry of Lutherans For Life, has been providing compassionate, confidential, and Scripture-based spiritual care since 1991. Originally created to support women facing surprise pregnancies and healing from past abortions, the ministry has grown to serve youth, adults, women, and men across a wide range of life issues—from fertilization to eternal life. In response to increasing needs, especially during the pandemic, Word of Hope expanded its services to include crisis intervention and referrals, education and training, and direct spiritual care.

Learn more about these services below or view the Word of Hope website at word-of-hope.org.



FOR HELP CALL: 888-217-8679



CRISIS INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

Word of Hope provides 24/7 crisis support via a national hotline, offering Gospel-centered guidance and referrals to local resources across the U.S. and Canada—making sure no one has to face overwhelming guilt, fear, or emotional struggles alone.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Word of Hope equips individuals, congregations, and communities through educational programs such as the *Mindfulness with Christ* course and the *HOPE for Suicide Awareness, Intervention, and Postvention* training. Other resources include presentations, digital media, and print materials, including Bible studies, podcasts, articles, and brochures that address a wide range of life issues.

SPIRITUAL CARE

Confidential, Christ-centered care is available for individuals, couples, and groups, grounded in Lutheran doctrine and the healing power of Law and Gospel. Services include the Redeeming Grace Abortion Recovery Retreat and support for imminent life issues such as abortion, suicide, physician-assisted suicide, and doubts about salvation. With a pastoral referral, it can also be extended to those dealing with grief, identity struggles, fear, hopelessness, and more—delivered via phone, text, email, or online.

CONGREGATIONAL HOUSE OF REFUGE

RESPONSE PLAN

Your congregation has publicly designated itself a Congregational House of Refuge. This means you have committed your community to surround and support those experiencing unplanned pregnancies. You proclaimed and positioned yourselves as a place of encouragement instead of condemnation, servanthood instead of superiority, and assistance instead of abandonment. You have embraced the privilege of bearing burdens together and delight in sharing celebrations. Your Gospel-motivated voice For Life is embodying God's truth and Christ's love to receive every human life as a blessing – no matter what size, skills, or circumstances.

SPIRITUAL CARE

More than anything or anyone else, the Lord Jesus Christ makes this Congregational House of Refuge. Your Congregational House of Refuge inquiries and contacts will come to you with emotional and psychological hardships as well as social and physical ones. The Savior's grace in forgiveness and the faith, guidance according to His words and ways, repentance and regeneration brought about by worship and sacraments, these meet their greatest needs. Anticipate attending to their spiritual care. Acquaint them with your pastor. Invite them to attend worship. Keep a stock of devotional resources (Bibles, catechisms, hymnals, prayer books, evangelistic materials) around to furnish them. Pray for and pray with each one. You are encountering persons, not statistics or projects or charity cases, but a gift and a privilege and a blessing whom Almighty God Himself holds precious, special, and priceless. We look forward to them becoming sisters and brothers with whom we may enjoy all of the immediate benefits and eternal delights He abundantly bestows upon His kingdom!

WHERE TO BEGIN

The joy begins even before anyone accepts these gracious invitations. Prepare for the hearts and lives the Lord our God is going to entrust to your care. They may be coming with immediate material needs. Keep a few key provisions on hand as an indication of your sincerity. Maintain a supply of pregnancy-related items:

- prenatal vitamins
- maternity clothing
- feminine hygiene products
- bottles and formula
- diapers and wipes
- infant clothing
- baby bathing and skin products
- towels and wash cloths

PARTNER WITH YOUR LOCAL PREGNANCY RESOURCE CENTER

Your closest pregnancy resource center (PRC) may have many of these available, and you don't have to duplicate their efforts. In fact, take the opportunity to initiate or reinforce your relationship with this facility and its ministry. Collaborate with the PRC to identify aid agencies, including potential medical providers, publicly-funded welfare operations, and relevant charities, e.g., WIC (Women Infants and Children, a federal program for food assistance, low income health care, and other referrals) and EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer, a card to purchase food and other items). Become familiar with local food shelves.

AREAS OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The Body of Christ steps in where customary family support is lacking, and this means balancing what beneficiaries need done for them with how we might empower them to achieve and obtain for themselves. Conversation about all parties' expectations and boundaries can reduce risks of exploiting the congregation's generosity on the one hand and paternalistically implying the neighbor's entire helplessness on the other.

SHELTER

Finding an adequate safe place to live is essential. Here are some examples to consider:

- Contact your local PRC, who may know of appropriate resources.
- Partner with an area maternity home.
- Recommend a safe house for abused victims; honor sensitivity.
- Reserve funds to cover an extended hotel stay or assist with rent.

TRANSPORTATION

Establish a team of volunteers available for shuttling between doctor's appointments, employment opportunities, and other errands. Access to public transit makes an appropriate alternative.

RELATIONSHIP

Relationship constitutes an important commodity. The statement does more than declare or invite. It commits your congregation to availability, assistance, and accompanying. Personally invite them to weekly worship when they are ready. Respect their vocational obligations. Establish accountability by verifying any limits on the congregation's benevolence. Share anticipated frequency and duration of interactions and what qualifies as an emergency requiring immediate attention. Continue to inquire and listen.

VOLUNTEER ROLES

Here are various volunteer roles congregations may provide to keep a strong focus on fulfilling the ministry of the Congregational House of Refuge program.

REPRESENTATIVE

The Congregational House of Refuge representative is the main point of contact within your church.

NOTE TO PASTOR: A litany is available for an installation of the representative on the LFL Congregational House of Refuge webpage.

MENTORS

- The mentor's role is to be a friend, support, and listening ear for a woman who has chosen life for her baby with the aim of connection with the church community.
- Mentors can support those hurting from abortion by connecting them to a post-abortion Bible study.
- Female mentors walk alongside a pregnant mom who chose life, a young single woman, or a single mom with children.
- Male mentors walk alongside a dad whose partner chose life, a young single man, or a single dad with children.
- Church members wrap around a family who is fostering children.



PRAYER PARTNERS

Prayer plays an important role. Let the representative know if you would like to be a prayer partner. This role may be filled by individuals or a prayer team praying for the women and men being served through this program. You may also incorporate this into a current prayer ministry at your local congregation.

REPRESENTATIVE POSITION DESCRIPTION

A Congregational House of Refuge cares for those experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. The church publicly designates itself a place of encouragement instead of condemnation, servanthood instead of superiority, and assistance instead of abandonment. This includes commitment to active ongoing support of expectant mothers and fathers. Each congregation appoints a volunteer representative who serves as primary advocate and contact for the program.

Congregational House of Refuge representative qualities:

- Reliable – someone the pastor trusts
- Attentive – listens for details and sees genuine needs
- Diligent – takes initiative, identifies tasks, and completes them
- Communicative – clearly corresponds and interacts with others
- Patient – remains engaged even amid delays and complications
- Collaborative – involves fellow parishioners, enlisting their help

Congregational House of Refuge representative responsibilities:

- Keeps the congregation mindful of the statement's pledges.
- Assures of God's forgiving fatherhood.
- Receives as Christ Jesus did, refraining from disregard or ridicule.
- Connects with anyone requesting pregnancy support.
- Coordinates resources and services within and outside the parish.
- Seeks involvement of congregation members.
- Remains regular in prayer, fervent in worship, attentive to the Scriptures, steadfast in confession and witness, earnest in celebration of all the Gospel's blessings, and thankful for the opportunity to serve.

Congregational House of Refuge representative draws upon these partnerships:

- Lutherans For Life Department of Volunteer Relations
- Network of Congregational House of Refuge congregations
- Local pregnancy resource centers and other support services
- Word of Hope crisis care and post-abortion healing hotline
- Congregation's pastoral and lay leaders



LUTHERANS FOR LIFE RESOURCES

Lutherans For Life has an array of print resources on various life issues available to order from cph.org. The following are some suggestions you may consider using.

PREGNANCY

- Human Development Y4Life Infographic Booklet Series
- When She Says, “I’m Pregnant”
- Life-Affirming Encouragement for Single Parents
- Abortion Pill Reversal – Saving a Pregnancy
- Word of Hope materials

MISCARRIAGE

- Miscarriages: An Empty Cradle and Full of Hope
- Fearfully and Wonderfully Made – A Life Worth Grieving For
- The Story of Baby Shalom

ABORTION

- Abortion and the Messages of the Church: Sin or Salvation
- After the Abortion There Is Hope in His Healing
- The Soul Wound of Abortion
- A Lutheran Catechism on Abortion and Life

OTHER

- Christian Life for Christian Women
- Biblical Manhood
- Christ and Adoption
- Jesus Loves Me and those with Down syndrome
- How Luther Nailed It on Life Issues
- The Reality of Words
- Speak Up For Life

This program was inspired by the LOVE  LIFE House of Refuge ministry. We thank them for their contributions.

