

# CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH ADVOCATE/PARISH NURSE MANUAL

*2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2016*



### *In Recognition*

**This LCMS parish nursing course is made available through LCMS Health Ministry. We appreciate the interest, dedication, commitment and collaboration of the many people who have donated their time, expertise and resources in developing the components of the course.**

**We recognize and appreciate Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, Wis., for permission to use some of their materials in the initial development of this course.**

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# CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH ADVOCATE/ PARISH NURSE MANUAL

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH ADVOCATE/PARISH NURSING MANUAL

### *Parish Nursing is also known as Faith Community Nursing.*

This revised and expanded manual is a contribution to the integration of the whole person – mind, body and spirit – and a tool to suggest how this holistic integration might be lived out in the Body of Christ, the Church.

As the Body of Christ, we come together as broken sinners in need of healing. We come to the Church as a place of healing, where we hear the voice of Christ through our pastor's speaking the words of forgiveness, life and salvation. We are washed clean and made new in the healing waters of Baptism. Our body and soul are served as we eat and drink Christ's very body and blood. Thus strengthened, we serve one another in love.

Within the Body of Christ, each member is vitally important, with varying gifts to offer. Congregational health advocacy provides a framework in which to acknowledge the needs and gifts of the Body of Christ, thus opening the way to intentional love and service to one another.

Another unique and complementary vocation of service is that of the parish nurse. This vocation brings with it professional nursing experience and expertise of mind-body-spirit health. Used within the context of the Body of Christ, the parish nurse can play a vital role in congregational health ministries.

A congregational health advocate might be another component to the emphasis on making the Church a place of healing.

# CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

***Congregational Health Advocacy Parish Nurse Task Force  
Mission Statement: To support and promote Christ-centered  
health and wellness of body, mind and spirit through congregational health ministries.***

Jesus comes to His creation as one of us, out of care for what He has made. By taking on flesh and blood, Jesus identifies with our every need. Jesus certainly came to earth to serve others but at times, He also allowed Himself to be served by others, showing us what it means to care for one another in body, mind and spirit.

Luke's Gospel paints a beautiful picture of how Jesus' needs of body, mind and spirit are cared for by others. His mother Mary nurtured Christ in her womb and continued that care when He was born as an infant. She fed Him, changed His diapers, clothed Him and nurtured and guided Him in the way of the Lord. In this humble submission to His mother and others in receiving acts of mercy and compassion, Jesus is one of us. He knows intimately what we need.

Jesus' body is like ours, except without sin. He who knew no sin became sin for us. He also knew and experienced suffering in His flesh, thus demonstrating compassion and His ability to aid in our own suffering in mind, body and spirit.

Jesus' ministry was one of redemption, healing and restoration. He healed people in their bodies and in their souls, by His words, His touch and His presence. Christ's healing ministry continues today by His Word, His very body and blood, and through His people who take care of others in body and soul. To care for others is to "be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (LUKE 6:36). To take care of body and soul is to fulfill Paul's plea to the Galatians: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (GAL. 6:2). We do this in Christ, as He Himself showed us. This Christ-centered care becomes our identity.

St. Paul also writes, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." (1 THESS. 5:23-24) He says in Romans, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought

from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (ROM. 6:12-14)

We, as the Body of Christ, strive to serve in love and care for one another in mind, body and spirit, for this is our Christian identity. Congregational health ministries can provide concrete ways to carry out Christ-centered care.

Congregational health advocacy is usually done by a parish nurse. When applicable, however, other health professionals or experienced laypersons may provide a congregational health program consistent with their education and licensure.

## A CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM MAY INCLUDE —

- education through promotion of wellness and health for all individuals within the congregation;
- consultation on health issues that relate to the wellness of the whole person;
- personal health counseling upon request or referral, within areas of professional competence;
- development of resources appropriate to the needs of the congregation;
- advocacy to ensure access to adequate health care for all;
- incorporation of Christian beliefs and practices into a plan for the individual, family, group or faith community as a whole;
- volunteer coordination through the recruitment and training of volunteers in care-giving situations;
- home visitation to offer support, to witness to the Gospel and to encourage compliance and adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviors;
- community connections through the healing resources of the community; and
- disability advocacy to ensure full participation of people with disabilities in the life of Christ's Church.





## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

**Q: Our congregation has an interest in doing something in the area of Christ-centered health and wellness. How do we get started?**

A: As the Body of Christ, we are called to serve one another and bear one another's burdens in love. St. Paul tells us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit given to us by God (1 Cor. 6:19). How we care for our bodies and one another is a visible expression of our identity in Christ. Understanding this Christ-centered identity and living out our identity as the baptized Body may require some further thought and action, since many people see the Church as caring for the soul, not the body.

One of the best ways for your church council or equivalent group to foster health and wellness in the congregation and community is to form a health and wellness committee. This group of interested, committed people can work together to form a plan to make Christ-centered health and wellness a part of your congregation's life and identity. In some congregations, health and wellness may become part of an already existing committee or board such as health and human care, stewardship, elders, fellowship or others.

**Q: Why another congregational committee?**

A: Christ-centered health and wellness as an integral part of congregational life may be a new concept for your congregation. Traditionally, congregations tend to focus on the spiritual needs of

the members, and many of the congregation's outreach activities are focused on reaching those spiritual needs. A congregational health and wellness committee can help the congregation understand that carrying out God's command to serve one another in love includes care of body, mind and spirit. This shift in congregational identity and emphasis and its implications for action can be dramatic and have far-reaching effects. For that reason, a committee with the specific task of increasing awareness of health and wellness is helpful in fostering the congregation in Christ-centered care of body, mind and spirit for the congregation and the community.

**Q: How does a health and wellness committee function?**

A: Members of the committee may be appointed. The task of the committee is to identify health concerns in the congregation and the community and to develop programs and resources to meet those needs. Records of meetings, a reporting and information-sharing plan and an evaluation strategy will help structure the committee.

**Q: When is the right time for a health and wellness committee?**

A: Very likely, your congregation already carries out a number of activities in the area of health and wellness. Some of these may be formal (e.g.,

classes and forums on health related issues); others may be informal (e.g., members who call on shut-ins). The right time for a committee is when it becomes important to feature these activities and bring health and wellness concerns to the attention of congregation members, and when it becomes helpful to coordinate all activities that fall into this area. Other indications of a need for a committee might include input from individuals who would like to see an integration of mind, body and spirit as it plays out in the life of the church, both individually and corporately. An overriding health concern (e.g., an increasing number of aged or infirmed in the congregation) might also be an indication of a need for a committee.

**Q: Who should be appointed to the health and wellness committee?**

A: The committee should include those who have shown an interest in promoting the church as a place of healing, and who act to help those who are broken in mind, body or spirit. People in the congregation with competence in health areas (doctors, nurses, social workers, alcohol and drug counselors) are also prime candidates. It is helpful to attempt to include representatives of various ages and interest groups. The committee should be accountable to a governing board of the congregation. The pastor or another congregational professional may want to serve as an advisory member.

**Q: What should a congregational health and wellness committee do?**

A: Recognizing that the needs of each congregation or community will differ, the focus and actions of the committees will also differ. For example, one community may need health education while another may be in the midst of a health care crisis. These needs should be identified through an assessment. The committee will need to shape their activities to fit the place where they are serving and the needs of the people in the area. In general, a committee can follow these steps as it organizes and prepares for action:

- Getting started. Include time for committee members to familiarize themselves with each other and with health and wellness issues.
- Assessing the congregational and community health needs. This can be done formally (by



survey) or informally (by interview, etc.) to define and prioritize areas of need.

- Defining objectives. List the goals of the committee. Where are we heading? What do we want to accomplish in this congregation and community? Which areas of concern demand action first?
- Deciding on a method. Generate a list of ideas and a plan of action. How will we proceed? What will we do first? What educational activities are necessary? What further planning is needed? What specific actions must take place?
- Partnering. Identify those who share common concerns and may be willing to help. Social service agencies, a local hospital, another congregation and LCMS Health Ministry can be good resources.
- Delegating tasks. Committee members can share responsibility for carrying out the goals. Specific tasks may be delegated to others who are interested and qualified.
- Monitoring activities. The committee will follow up on delegated responsibilities and specific tasks.
- Evaluating activities. The committee will want to plan specific check points (e.g., after six months) to evaluate progress against overall objectives and plans.

**Q: What are the limits of this program?**

A: We are all sinful people who need Christ's healing and redemption, gifts He freely gives us. As broken people living in a sinful and fallen world, however, it is a struggle to live out our lives in the Body of Christ. Health advocacy points the broken and suffering to the One who heals and redeems. This program strives to help people live out their lives as ones baptized and restored, even though illness, addictions and death continue.

Participation is voluntary. The parish nurse/health advocate does not provide invasive treatment, duplicate other available health services or replace the patient's doctor or other health care provider.

**Q: Who might be the health ministry staff?**

A: The staff position in congregational health advocacy, consistent with its mission and function statements, is for educational and support ministry. The committee may appoint a health advocate or parish nurse from available and qualified candidates.

**Q: To whom is the staff responsible?**

A: Immediate responsibility for the health program of the congregation rests with a health and wellness committee which, in coordination with the health advocate, shapes the program to the specific needs of the congregation. The committee offers support to the health advocate (or parish nurse) as well as building awareness of parish health advocacy in the congregation. The health and wellness committee may be responsible to another congregational group, such as the board of elders or human care ministry committee.

A congregational health program functions within policies established by the congregation. The health advocate (or parish nurse) is a part of the church staff and works closely with the pastoral staff.

**Q: What about a budget?**

A: Funds should be included annually in the budget of the congregation. The budget should include all or part of the payment of premiums for professional liability insurance. Full— or part-time salary for a health advocate/parish nurse may also be included.

The health advocate/parish nurse should always be a staff position, but the unique interests, needs and resources of the congregation will determine the practice.

**TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL HEALTH ADVOCACY**

- The Body of Christ is a community which shares a central reality: Jesus Christ. Understanding the concept of Christ's Body, His Church, allows all members to have a place in the Church. Each member has something to offer.
- Ongoing Bible studies focusing on Jesus' healing ministry of mind, body and spirit and on the Word and Sacrament can be helpful.
- Congregation members need to be involved from the beginning. Providing general information on how the Church can be a healing place is necessary to help the membership understand the importance of health advocacy.
- Information from the needs assessment should be publicized in the congregation and used by the health committee when planning programs.
- The health committee or a representative should meet regularly with the pastor to keep him informed about plans, goals and concerns.

**PARISH NURSING IN THE LCMS**

The term *faith community* nurse has been adopted by the American Nurses Association, but parish nursing remains an appropriate term. Individuals may opt for either term, but LCMS Health Ministry will continue to use *parish nurse*.







## AREAS OF PARISH NURSING PRACTICE



### INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND HEALTH

#### *The parish nurse —*

- recognizes God as the Creator and Giver of life, and healing as part of the redemptive and restorative ministry of Jesus;
- recognizes that all people are broken sinners in need of Christ's mercy and healing, and that the Church is a place of healing;
- points broken sinners to Word and Sacrament as strength for body and soul;
- is active in the Divine Service, Bible study, personal devotions and prayer;
- maintains an ongoing, open relationship with the pastor, elders and other parish nurses for ongoing examination of spiritual distress;
- recognizes that every individual is unique with God-given capacities, abilities and needs;
- assesses each person under his or her care holistically according to mind, body and spirit, recognizing the intricate balance involved;
- conceptualizes the interrelationship of disturbances in the emotional, physical and psycho-social life of a member with disturbances in the member's spiritual life;
- assesses the holistic needs of the congregation and collects data that is comprehensive and accurate;
- analyzes data collected about the congregation to determine the health needs of the congregation and its members;

- points to Jesus as the source of all healing, relying on Word and Sacrament as the basis of all spiritual care, under the supervision of the pastor;
- incorporates the principles and skills of spiritual intervention into his or her parish nursing practice;
- provides basic spiritual care under the direction of the pastor through Scripture, prayer and encouragement to utilize the Means of Grace; and
- evaluates the effects of health advocacy in the congregation in terms of structure, process and outcome.



### HEALTH EDUCATOR

#### *The parish nurse —*

- applies theoretical and Scriptural concepts as a basis for decisions in the role of health educator;
- systematically collects comprehensive and accurate data for use in health education;
- plans data collection and analyzes data about the congregation to determine health needs of the congregation and its members;
- intervenes to promote, maintain or restore health and to effect rehabilitation;
- documents and keeps necessary records, while protecting the individual's right to confidentiality; and
- evaluates responses of the congregation to interventions in order to determine progress toward goal achievement and to revise the database, needs and plan.



## HEALTH COUNSELOR

*The parish nurse —*

- applies theoretical and Scriptural concepts as a basis for decision-making in practice;
- systematically collects comprehensive and accurate data in reference to the health counseling needs of the congregation;
- analyzes data collected about the congregation to determine health needs of the congregation and its members;
- develops plans to meet health counseling needs of the congregation;
- intervenes to promote, maintain or restore health and to effect rehabilitation;
- respects confidentiality;
- documents and keeps necessary records; and
- evaluates responses of the congregation to interventions in order to determine progress toward goal achievement and to revise the database, diagnoses and plan.



## LIAISON TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES

*The parish nurse —*

- is a viable expression of the Christ-centered congregation within the community;
- evaluates the congregation to determine health and wellness goals and revises those goals as needed;
- collects and analyzes data in reference to the health and wellness needs of the congregation;
- develops plans to meet health and wellness needs of the congregation;
- respects confidentiality;
- documents and keeps necessary records; and
- evaluates the response of the congregation and community in order to determine progress.



## COORDINATOR OF VOLUNTEERS

*The parish nurse —*

- plans for ways to expand the healing ministry of the church through use of volunteers, recognizing that volunteers differ in gifts, resources of time, talents and motivation;
- enables volunteer caregivers to experience a service of meaning and purpose that fosters wellness, training and recognition when appropriate;
- documents and keeps necessary records to effectively enable the above; and
- evaluates the response of the congregation in order to determine progress toward goals.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The parish nurse —*

- assumes responsibility for professional development and contributes to the professional growth of others;
- collaborates with other health care providers, professionals and community representatives in assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating programs for congregational and/or community health; and
- stays informed about theory and practice of parish nursing via independent reading, conferences and networking.

# PARISH NURSING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CREDENTIALING

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Parish nursing is a unique blend of professional nursing and spiritual caregiving. We recommend that the parish nurse attend a preparation program for parish nursing that is offered through an LCMS provider. Parish nurses who have completed another preparation course can supplement their learning through the theology sessions provided by LCMS Health Ministry. We recommend one of the following:

**Concordia University Wisconsin** • 262-243-4233

**Concordia University Nebraska** • 877-497-5848

**LCMS Health Ministry** • [lcms.org/health](http://lcms.org/health)

LCMS Health Ministry has developed the following opportunities:

- *Introduction to Parish Nursing in a Lutheran Setting*, an online course which includes videos, print materials and mentoring.
- Theology DVDs which are available online.
- A portfolio review (see [lcms.org/health](http://lcms.org/health) for procedure).

Additional educational opportunities on special topics will be added at regular intervals.

Although *Scope and Standards for Faith Community Nursing* (2012, p. 78) states that any parish nurse who completes a parish nurse preparation program may use the initials “FCN,” as of September 2015 this is no longer the approved practice.

The Health Ministry Association and American Nurses Credentialing Center have established a procedure for credentialing and requested a change in title designations to avoid possible misunderstandings. Board certification (credentialing) is not required but is an option similar to the option for other nursing specialties (see [nursecredentialing.org/FaithCommunityNursing](http://nursecredentialing.org/FaithCommunityNursing)).

The nurse who has a certificate of completion in parish nursing should use a uniform designation. See sample below:

Nancy Nurse, BSN, RN  
Parish Nurse  
St. Luke Lutheran Church  
City, State

The nurse who successfully completes the credentialing portfolio should use the following designation:

Nancy Nurse, BSN, RN-BC  
Parish Nurse  
St. Luke Lutheran Church  
City, State

The parish nurse may opt to pursue additional education leading to rostering as a lay minister or deaconess. Further information is available by contacting the following:

**Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, Wis.**  
(Lay Ministry) • 262-243-5700

**The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod**  
(Deaconess Ministry) • 314-996-1387

The parish nurse is encouraged to participate in continuing education opportunities offered through LCMS providers to enhance their expertise in spiritual and theological content consistent with the teachings of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The parish nurse is also encouraged to take advantage of the numerous theological publications and resources available through LCMS Health Ministry.

*Please note that this education can be obtained through Christian Caregiving: The Concept and Practice of Parish Nursing and Congregational Health Ministries at Concordia University Wisconsin (contact [carol.lueders.bolwerk@cuw.edu](mailto:carol.lueders.bolwerk@cuw.edu)). A training session can also be provided within the district. The LCMS Northern Illinois District Parish Nurse Network offers a biannual course for interested people in their district. District representatives for parish nursing who may be interested in developing their own training session are welcome to contact the LCMS Northern Illinois District Parish Nurse Network for more information ([ni.lcms.org](http://ni.lcms.org)). *Introduction to Parish Nursing* ([lcms.org](http://lcms.org)) can be adapted for the person who has education or experience in a related health field and desires to be a congregational health advocate.*

## LIABILITY PROTECTION

Congregational health advocacy is an ever-expanding area within many denominations, including The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Along with the increased service comes an increasing number of inquiries about liability and insurance.

Parish nurses should be aware that questions of liability are not contingent upon whether or not the nurse is paid a salary. All parish nurses are responsible for the maintenance of quality care standards and must perform within the scope of the nurse practice act of his or her state. Parish nurses must provide a competent, high-quality professional nursing practice that is consistent with professional standards in every circumstance.

Liability insurance should be carried by the parish nurse and the congregation. The same insurance carrier that covers professional nurses in other settings will, in most cases, cover the nurse in the parish nurse role. Not all insurance carriers, however, are familiar with the role of the parish nurse. In some cases, the insurance carrier will seek clarification of services provided. The commonly identified categories of service include health educator, health counselor, referral agent, developer of support groups, trainer of volunteers and integration of faith and health.

Congregations may find that their liability insurance plan will include the services of the parish nurse. Other congregations, however, may find that their carrier is unfamiliar with the role of a parish nurse and excludes this coverage. Some insurance plans will include the services of a parish nurse for a nominal additional fee.

Some insurance carriers for congregations ask that the parish nurse complete a parish nurse educational program.

LCMS Health Ministries does not endorse any individual insurance provider.

## INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARISH NURSES

Parish nurses serve in the congregation, community and world. As parish nurses take advantage of specific mission and ministry service in the world, they may represent their congregation. This provides the parish nurse with opportunities to involve the members of the congregation in opportunities to share with others through donations of materials or funds and prayers. The parish nurse is encouraged to share experiences with the congregation to heighten their awareness of the needs of others in the world.

Specific international opportunities for parish nurses include –

- 1. Mercy Medical Teams** (through LCMS Health Ministry) provide short-term service in diverse places in the world. ([lcms.org/mercyteams](http://lcms.org/mercyteams))
- 2. Parish nurse teams** (primarily LCMS parish nurses) travel to Bethlehem in Palestine annually to provide encouragement and support for the parish nurse at Christmas Lutheran Church and Diyar Consortium in Bethlehem. ([brightstarsbethlehem.org](http://brightstarsbethlehem.org))
- 3. Others such as Lutherans in Medical Missions** (LIMM) and Mission Opportunities Short Term (MOST) have opportunities available for parish nurses.





## A SPECIAL WORD TO PASTORS

As the Body of Christ, we come together as broken sinners in need of healing. We come to the Church as a place of healing, where we hear the voice of Christ through our pastor's speaking the words of forgiveness, life and salvation. We are washed clean and made new in the healing waters of Baptism. Our body and soul are served as we eat and drink Christ's very Body and Blood. Thus strengthened, we serve one another in love.

As the Body of Christ, each member is vitally important, with varying gifts to offer. Congregational health advocacy is a way in which to acknowledge the needs and gifts of the Body of Christ, thus opening the way to intentional love and service to one another.

To see the Church as a healing place is to see Jesus. Jesus is the source of all healing, reconciliation and restoration. Jesus is present in His Church in Word and Sacrament, bringing healing with His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. The Church, as Christ's Body, is a place of healing, a place of well-being, a holy place, a sanctuary set apart for broken sinners in need of a Savior. Week in and week out, we come as those who hunger and thirst for Christ's healing, receiving restoration from the Baptismal font to the Lord's Table to the grave.

We come to Christ's Church, weary and weighed down by the sin that affects us all in body and soul. We come to Christ's Church needing forgiveness from the sins that weigh us down, from the burdens that are heavy upon our hearts. We come to Christ's Church with bodies that are wearing out or that may be diseased with cancer, heart disease or arthritis. We come to Christ's Church with less obvious maladies of depression, addictions, abuse, shame and guilt.

We all suffer in body and soul to one degree or another. Yet the Church has often been seen as a place offering only spiritual care, not a place of healing for body *and* soul. How do we return to seeing the Church as a place to be strengthened in body and soul? How do we understand Christ-centered care of body *and* soul, or body, mind and spirit?

These are the questions that led to the 1998 Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod convention to proclaim and emphasize the “integration of spirit, mind and body in the life of the disciple.” The resulting resolution was “that the Synod celebrate the blessing of God in our historic emphasis on Word and Sacrament, even as we now seek to apply more profoundly that continuing emphasis on the whole person.”

This integration of spirit, mind and body is no new concept. Christ's earthly ministry is exemplary of this. He cared for the whole person, performing miracles of healing that involved not just forgiving people of their sins, but also restoring their physical bodies and frame of mind.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PASTORS ABOUT PARISH NURSING

### **Q: Who is a parish nurse?**

**A:** A parish nurse is the visible expression of the congregation's health ministry. Gifted and educated for a health profession, the parish nurse assists members in the Body of Christ in the care and nurture of the life God has given them. The parish nurse integrates knowledge of mind-body-spirit health and wellness in helping people gain a greater understanding of what it means to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

The parish nurse seeks to optimize the present and future health of members. Brought forward in the life of the congregation, the promotion of Christ-centered health and wellness is recognized as a faith opportunity. Speaking out of the context of the common faith of the congregation, the parish nurse brings the motivation of Christ's love to health enhancement. Heading a planned health program, the nurse conveys the congregation's concern and encouragement to the individual.

As a registered nurse, the parish nurse is a graduate from a four-year baccalaureate program, a three-year diploma program or a two-year associate degree program. A registered nurse is qualified to make independent nursing decisions and take independent nursing actions.

As a graduate from a one-year nursing program, a licensed practical nurse has significant limitations in education and nursing functions. The nurse practice act does not permit independent function.

### **Q: Can parish nursing help my ministry?**

**A:** Yes, in several ways:

- As a pastor, you declare Christ's forgiveness and love and also His healing ministry to the sick and His desire for the care of the life He has entrusted to us. A parish nurse gives practical expression to health ministry. Nurses are professionally qualified and have training in assessing the whole person in body, mind and spirit, and thus are able to address physical, emotional, mental and spiritual issues.
- As a pastor you may delegate some of the Christian teaching for Christ-centered health and wellness to the parish nurse.
- The parish nurse can help you achieve your personal health goals.
- A nursing assessment may add to your understanding of the person and his or her spiritual need. For example, a couple distancing themselves from the church may be having serious marital trouble. To an elder or the pastor they may hint vaguely at work schedules, weekends in the country or extended family care needs. They don't want to go public with their conflict.

### **Q: How can I work with someone who comes from a non-church profession?**

**A:** Parish nursing is not a community clinic opened in a church facility; it is more than a nursing practice set up in a church. Parish nursing is an extension of Christ's health ministry. Christ's compassion and love for His people led to His suffering and death to make people whole in body, mind and soul. The Spirit is also at work within us, providing restoration through Word and Sacrament. Fortified by this



credo, the congregation, through a health cabinet or similar group, sets up the health program. The needs/opportunities present in the congregation and the integrity of the nursing profession are honored.

For an effective working relationship between the pastor and parish nurse, these additional observations can be made.

In the congregation's health ministry, the pastor and parish nurse coordinate efforts. As a pastor, you are called to Law and Gospel ministry administered through Word and Sacraments.

The parish nurse is by education a health care professional. Many nursing procedures are independent judgments that do not require the physician's direction. This is true of most of the procedures the parish nurse is likely to do. Parish nurse preparation programs include training in team ministry. The parish nurse is legally accountable to the nurse practice act of the state where licensed. The nurse has a unique vocation to serve those under his or her care.

The pastor and parish nurse have separate yet complementary functions in Christian health ministry. At their common point of meeting, they are bound to confidentiality by their professional ethics. Anecdotal material and information given in confidence to either the nurse or the pastor may not be shared. Professional assessments may be shared for better care of the person served.

#### **Q: Will parish nursing benefit our members?**

A: Illness is an isolating experience. A woman confined for eight weeks with pneumonia commented, "No one called. I thought the church had forgotten me." A parish nurse can break into that isolation, affirm the church's concern and reconnect the individual and congregation. This is a common experience among the homebound.

A parish nurse encourages and supports the medical regimen through warm presence, reinforcement of the regimen through explanation of the purpose and expected results and through prayer. This support is often critical to patient participation and eventual healing.

In the present health care environment in which the individual is increasingly responsible for his or her health, parish nursing connects personal responsibility with the understanding of what

it means to live out one's Christian identity, redeemed and restored by Christ. Members neglecting moderation and general stewardship of their physical health are often responsive to the invitation to join others in the Christian community in wellness programs.

Some members, notably the bereaved, single parents, the divorced and those struggling with food and substance abuse, can profit from joining a support group initiated in the congregation or available elsewhere. A Christian health ministry can facilitate such participation.

#### **Q: Will the congregation as a whole benefit?**

A: In congregations committed to parish nursing, a deeper sense of Christian community has been a welcome discovery. In a society of transient relationships, the heart hungers for community. Parish nursing raises the awareness of the congregation to this ministry's effect on the spiritual, relational, emotional and physical health of the whole Christian community. Parish nurses organize, train and provide consistent volunteer service to the congregation.



**Q: We are a mission-minded congregation. Will the emphasis on health change our focus?**

A: Proclamation and Gospel witness are the principle ways of declaring salvation in Jesus Christ. Fulfilling the greatest Law of Christ by bearing one another's burdens in love is a visible expression of our Christian identity. Numerous examples of ministries that combine parish nursing with outreach in the community exist. For example:

- One pastor reports that on some nights people from the community outnumber members at health education functions.
- A Texas congregation has tailored parish nursing to community outreach.
- In some communities, neighbors or family members have been drawn to the church by the parish nurse's service.
- Support groups are one avenue to the heart of the community.

**Q: What about cost? Can we justify a parish nurse?**

A: Launching a parish nurse program is not without cost. There will be two kinds of expenses: equipment and personnel.

Basic equipment includes furnished office space, a blood pressure cuff, a stethoscope, a filing cabinet (to keep confidential records), a telephone and a desk. Other items may include a display rack for health resources and a scale. Funding may come from organizations, memorials, an annual offering or the church budget.

In many beginning situations, the parish nurse is unpaid staff, receiving only reimbursed mileage and other basic expenses.

Congregations often provide all or part of the cost for parish nurse education. A local hospital may partner with a congregation to provide a part-time parish nurse. Several congregations could also band together to support a parish nurse. As parish nursing establishes its value, congregational support will grow. Liability coverage is a consideration. Please see the previous section on liability.







THE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
Missouri Synod

## Health Ministry

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