Information for Clergy

Common Questions Regarding Faith Community/Parish Nursing:
(Adapted from the International Parish Nurse Resource Center, now called the Westberg Institute for Faith Community Nursing)
www.westberginstitute.org

1. What is the ministry of faith community/parish nursing practice?

Faith Community/Parish nursing is a health promotion, disease prevention ministry based on the care of the whole person and encompassing several functions. These functions are

- Integrator of faith and health
- Health educator
- Personal health counselor
- Referral agent
- Trainer of volunteers
- Developer of support groups
- Health advocate

This nursing role does not embrace the medical model of care or invasive practices such as blood drawing, medical treatments, maintenance of intravenous products, administration of flu shots or medications. It is a professional model of health ministry using a registered nurse. The focus of the practice is the faith community and its ministry. This ministry is intended on being integrated into the life of the congregation, revitalizing the mission of health and healing of the congregation, with the parish nurse being a regular member of the ministerial staff.

2. How does one begin the development of a faith community/parish nurse ministry?

Education on the ministry of parish/faith community nursing practice is ongoing, but essential for initiating the work. Important early in the work is to help individuals gain an appropriate mindset of the congregation as a place in the community where health is a priority. The definition of health as we speak of it here is “whole person oriented“ and more than just physical. It incorporates the body, mind and spirit. In a congregation the nurse is not the provider of medication, dressing changes and other physical care. Rather, the parish/faith community nurse provides education, support and identification of local resources in order to avoid duplication of services.

As the clergy, it is important to understand that this ministry is a support to the good work you are already doing, and will not duplicate or replace any part of your important ministry. It may be helpful to contact denominational offices to see what resources they have available to assist in this work. Some denominations may have a designated parish/faith community nurse consultant for their denomination. Once your education has begun, it may be helpful to establish a task force that can do some of the basic work while keeping the congregation informed of progress.
3. How long does it take to establish a faith community/parish nurse ministry?

Often times those interested in developing a faith community nurse ministry perceive it as a simple endeavor requiring little time, effort and resources. Like any other ministry being introduced into the congregation, if it is to sustain over time, careful planning and implementation need to be provided. Often the work group meets once a month for two hours. This reflects the voluntary nature of the work and the importance of developing a sound foundation for the ministry to sustain. It can take as long as twelve to twenty-four months to establish the faith community nurse ministry. However, in taking that time and expending the effort, it is more likely that the ministry will be integrated successfully into the life of the congregation.

4. Why is attendance at a basic preparation course using the standardized core curriculum in faith community/parish nursing recommended?

The American Nurses Association, since 1997, recognizes parish nursing as a specialty practice. In 1998, The American Nurses Association published The Scope and Standards of Parish Nursing. This was revised in 2004, and in 2012, Faith Community Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice was published. Faith Community Nursing is recognized as a separate specialty in nursing practice similar to pediatric nursing or geriatric nursing. It is a professional model of health ministry because the nurse is a registered professional nurse, and must work according to the nurse practice act of the state in which she/he is practicing and must also comply with the identified standards of practice. Additionally, most nurses are not familiar with working in a congregation or the theological perspectives on health and healing which requires specific preparation. The standardized core curriculum has been developed through the International Parish Nurse Resource Center (IPNRC), now called the Westberg Institute for Faith Community Nursing, by dozens of faith community nurse experts from across the United States. This curriculum includes content on the theology of health as well as prayer and worship. It is a worthwhile investment to assure the nurse has the proper training so that the ministry can support you in your role of congregational care. (see #10 below for more about The Westberg Institute)

5. How much does the ministry of faith community/parish nursing cost?

Basic start-up expenses are minimal. The financial perspectives of the development and integration of the ministry of faith community nursing practice depend largely on the organizational framework that is chosen, the size and resources of the congregation, the support of the pastor and the philosophy of the denomination. Course tuition for the nurse varies; locally (Winchester, VA) the cost is approximately $450 including all materials. The return on investment for a congregation is beyond measure as the FCN will provide a wealth of information and inspiration benefitting the overall wellness of a congregation.

Paid roles would have different budgetary considerations than an unpaid FCN. Cost is an issue that is important to deal with early in the development of the ministry. The curriculum will include accessing resources at low or no cost. Networking with others within your denomination or community may help in answering some of the financial questions.
6. What about liability insurance?

Liability insurance is a must for both the parish nurse and congregation. Coverage is available for a nominal fee through many church denominations as well as through other resources. The typical policy ranges from $50-$150/year. It is important to note that since its inception over 20 years ago, there has never been a lawsuit brought against a faith community nurse, so it would stand to reason the liability is very small. However, prudence is always wise in this litigious society in which we live; therefore, the purchase of a policy is advisable.

7. What can I do to prepare to have a faith community/parish nurse ministry as part of the congregation I serve?

Ask questions and read the available literature on parish/faith community nursing. Re-look at Scripture from the perspective of health and healing. Explore information on-line. Many denominations have a link on their website related to health and healing associated with parish/faith community nursing. In addition, Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia has multiple written and electronic resources available. It is important for clergy to be able to see the possibilities in revitalizing the mission of health and healing in their faith community. The faith community nurse ministry can be a concrete way in which to live out the call to preach, teach and heal by being available when there is a health related need.

8. What are the different organizing frameworks for the ministry of faith community/parish nursing practice?

There are four basic organizing frameworks for the ministry of faith community/parish nursing practice. There are derivations of these frameworks that have developed over time. The four organizing frameworks are:

- **Institutional/paid**—The nurse is paid in the faith community/parish nurse position. The pay for the position may be generated from the institution or the congregation. In some instances, the nurse may be an employee of the institution, and the congregation will contract with the institution for a specific nurse’s services. There is a contract or covenant between the congregation and the institution that specifies the roles, responsibilities and contributions of each party. The institution may be a health care system, school of nursing, community coalition, home care agency, long term care facility, diocese or other incorporated entity.

- **Institutional/unpaid**—The nurse is not paid for the services provided in the faith/parish community nurse position. However, there is a covenant or agreement between the congregation and the institution regarding theological reflection and ongoing continuing education of the nurse, as well as consultation on the documentation of services rendered and maintenance of health records in the congregation.

- **Congregational/paid**—The nurse is paid and there is no relationship with an institution. This will require the nurse and/or congregation to develop written guidelines that describe the nature of the ministry and how continuing education and opportunities for ongoing spiritual formation are provided for the nurse. This is usually done in the form
of a job description and the parish/faith community nurse is on the staff of the faith community.

- Congregational/unpaid—the nurse is not paid or compensated for the time given in this ministry. This requires the nurse and/or congregation to develop written guidelines that describe the nature of the ministry and how continuing education and ongoing spiritual formation is provided for the nurse.

9. **How many faith community/parish nurse ministries are there in the United States?**

Over 12,000 registered nurses have been prepared using the standardized core curriculum from the International Parish Nurse Resource Center. There are Faith Community Nurses practicing in all 50 states and in several countries. The clear message is that the specialty is growing. More people in more congregations are able to access a faith community nurse to assist them in integrating their faith in addressing their health.

10. **How can the Westberg Institute for Faith Community Nursing assist me in this process?**

The purpose of the Westberg Institute (WI) is to promote the development of quality parish/faith community nurse programs through education, consultation and research. The staff of the resource center is there to serve you. The website is: [www.westberginstitute.org](http://www.westberginstitute.org)

The WI (2016), formerly called the IPNRC, moved from St. Louis, MO to Memphis, TN in October 2011 and is part of the Church Health Center. More information related to health ministry may be found at the WI website as well as at [www.churchhealthcenter.org](http://www.churchhealthcenter.org)

**For further questions you may contact:**

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