



PARISH
NURSING



& the



CHRISTIAN
SUPPORT
NETWORK

*We love because He first loved us.
(1 John 4:19)*



PARISH NURSING & THE CHRISTIAN SUPPORT NETWORK (CSN)

In 2000, CLR developed the outline of a program (called the Christian Support Network – CSN) that was designed to help congregations meet two needs. The first was to establish a structure for helping members with physical and emotional needs that are not being met through the congregation’s current ministry. The second was to give congregations the structure to demonstrate Christian love to unbelievers who need to hear the Gospel and also to see Christ’s love demonstrated in the lives of others.

From the start, Parish Nursing was seen as a component of the CSN program. This booklet is meant to give details, ideas, and encouragement for congregations to develop or expand their current services and to incorporate Parish Nursing into the overall ministry.

In-Reach & Outreach

The CSN ministry easily fits an “in-reach” model. Simply stated, if there are members of your congregation who need help this is an ideal vehicle by which to coordinate those helping efforts. An “in-reach” ministry is characterized by its focus on believers. While sometimes an in-reach ministry may work to bring the delinquent back to church, in that regard it is still “in-reach.” It is a ministry to those who already believe, and is meant to encourage and strengthen an existing faith.

Outreach ministry is one that seeks to touch the hearts and lives of the unbelievers in the world. Outreach ministry is very challenging and has an overall sense of urgency about it. The CSN ministry is an ideal fit for an outreach ministry to unbelievers. By acts of kindness and love you open up possibilities for sharing your faith and the salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. Parish Nursing is particularly effective, because health issues are universal and serve as effective avenues for demonstrating Christian compassion.

Jesus once said, *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:16)

Peter wrote, *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”* (1 Peter 3:15)

With this ministry of love and compassion you become a shining light and people will ask you how you do it. They will want to know your source for hope and confidence.

Your acts of kindness will provide you the forum to testify to the reason for the hope that you have. When you provide that testimony God will use that means of grace (His Word) to touch their hearts so that those who saw your good deeds will now be able to praise God their Creator.

Initially you will want to start the CSN ministry as an “in-reach” effort. You do it that way because it is easiest and provides a good foundation upon which to build.

Then, those with whom you visit become your referral sources. They will tell you about their friend or relative who does not know Christ. You will then be able to follow-up on that name and share with them the message of salvation.

The CSN ministry has tremendous outreach potential. Look imaginatively at your program and see what doors are open for you.

Two Ways to Look At It

The heart of this ministry is what we do for others. There are two ways to look at it. We can consider the target audiences or the target activities. The following sections give ideas to help guide you in determining your direction.

TARGET AUDIENCES

This section helps you think of groups of people in your congregation or community who need services that can be met by parish nurses.

New Moms: Each time God brings a new life into the family there is a level of disruption. A new mother, whether married or not, sometimes can use a little voice of experience and a helping hand in getting adjusted to this new responsibility. New mothers in the congregation and in the community are ideal candidates for assistance. Perhaps it begins with bringing over a cute little baby gift or some booties knit by shut-ins or the congregation’s ladies’ organization. From that point on there are avenues for babysitting, child development issues, fatigue or post-partum discussion, immunization topics, infant illnesses, and just plain talking and witnessing.

The Widowed: The term “widowed” is synonymous with “loneliness.” Often it is after many years of marriage that one finds him or herself widowed. A parish nurse should take note of specific times when grief will be particularly harsh. Many friends and congregational members will provide support at the time of the death and funeral. That support will generally fade within three weeks and certainly within six weeks. Be prepared to visit a widow(er) about three months after the funeral, because everyone else will have returned to their routines by that time. Family holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, July 4, etc. could be particularly difficult. Personal or family events (birthdays, wedding anniversaries, confirmations, weddings, etc.) are also times to provide support.

The Shut In: This is a rather broad term used to describe those who generally are not able to get out of house, nursing home or other care institution to regularly attend church or church functions. Remember that one of the biggest issues for shut-ins is the personal loss of freedom and mobility. Networking with transportation services might be a critical service to provide.

The Institutionalized: This category can refer to those in prison or jail as well as others who are confined to an extended care facility. These people provide a wonderful opportunity to share God's love and to witness to your faith. If you enter into this type of ministry you will want to avail yourself of the resources provided by the Special Ministries division of the WELS and Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministry (phone: 414-259-8122).

Recovery Patients: These are people who have experienced a recent surgery or illness and are in the process of recovering back to health. Your medical experience will be welcomed, but this is also a time of patient frustration and questioning which requires some spiritual application in addition to your medical expertise.

School Children: The days of a County School Nurse visiting the schools on a regular basis are gone for most communities. You can provide help with various screenings (vision, hearing, immunization records, head lice, etc.) and you can also help with training of the faculty in areas of CPR, first aid, blood-borne pathogens, etc. You might also serve as a resource for health classes. You can cover topics like nutrition, cleanliness, human development, etc.

TARGET ACTIVITIES

This section helps you think of activities that would help you, as the parish nurse, and your congregation, serve fellow members or your community.

Blood Pressure Screening: This is one of the first activities for many new parish nursing practices. It is easy to do, it is appreciated by your members, it opens lines of communication, and it is a positive way to promote your services. In most cases, it is effective to hold these screenings after Sunday services.

Health Fairs: These events are coordinated by the parish nurse, but the parish nurse should not provide all the services. Find local organizations who can address specific topics that are pertinent to your members or community. Health Fairs are often large events that include a wide variety of booths, but you can also run a series of small events that focus on specific issues. For example, hold a one-day opportunity to receive a flu shot, a day to donate blood, an event for provide diabetes training, or other specific services.

Produce a Parish Nurse Newsletter: This can be incorporated into the church's monthly newsletter or a stand-alone piece. It can include topics that relate to the season or upcoming events.

Establish a Health Corner at Church: This can be a bulletin board, a table, a bookshelf, a tract rack, or other simple means of displaying materials that inform your members on various topics of interest.

Parish Nurse Sundays: Select specific Sundays and designate them for providing services to your members. You would be available to answer questions or provide advice on a variety of issues that members have.

Home Visitations: This can be linked to your audience, but it can also be part of a general visitation program by the congregation. Being part of the visitation team provides additional services that are unique to your training as a nurse. In some cases, outreach-minded congregations promote their parish nurse as one example of their broad range of services.

Key Considerations

A parish nurse is ideally a part of the ministry team within a congregation. That means you use your medical training as a bridge to share the Gospel with people. Within that role, you should consider these issues:

Identify the Problem – You have been trained in assessing physical conditions, but you are now going to be involved in some spiritual issues. Be aware there are spiritual components to your work, but also rely on others, specifically your spiritual leaders, to help when needed.

Spiritualize the Problem - Regardless of how the problem is presented to you, re-frame it within the context of the person's relationship with God. Keep the discussion on a spiritual plane. If you don't know how to do that ask the pastor to assist and train you in this area.

Know your Limits - Most, if not all of you, are not professional counselors. Work closely with the network coordinator in knowing the resources available in tackling some of these problems. Always try to refer to more qualified personnel but stand ready to supplement and support the person through it all.

Work Cooperatively with the Pastor – Parish nurses use health issues as a bridge to share the Gospel. That means you are involved in both physical and spiritual matters. You and your pastor can make a wonderful team if you understand your unique roles and have mutual respect for each other's training.

Confidentiality - This is first and foremost a matter of good judgment. Do not go about sharing the dirty laundry of those who confide in you. At the same time, do not pledge to remain silent when the information revealed to you could endanger someone else.

When the issue of confidentiality arises assure them that what is shared will be confidential as far as the law and the policies of this ministry allow. Your pastor will help define the confidential limits of the ministry (i.e. will he or an elder insist on knowing the issues, etc.).

Devotional Activities - Always be ready to share God's Word. Sometimes the devotional moments of a visit might be as formal as reading from a devotional book and saying the prayer. At other times it might be the discussion of one or two passages. The devotional component of any visit provides its distinctive spiritual dimension which is the most critical part of what this ministry is all about. Have specific discussions with your pastor in advance of doing devotional activities. He can provide training, and in some situations your pastor might have concerns about the resources or methods you use.

Documentation – all nurses are well-aware of the need for documentation and Parish Nursing also requires adequate record-keeping. Prepare your forms that will be used for your documentation and share them with your pastor and any appropriate boards or committees. Also develop a plan for maintaining privacy and share that policy with the same individuals.

Know Your Local Resource Referrals - It would be helpful to compile a list of local agencies and keep that list readily available. Include addresses and phone numbers for such agencies as:

- Public Health Agencies & Hospitals**
- Social Services**
- Child Protective Services**
- Senior Citizen Residences**
- American Diabetes Association**
- American Cancer Society**
- Mental Health Agencies**

This list will grow as new services are identified.

Conclusion

Many nurses serve as a “nurse in the parish” which is a wonderful way to use your professional training to serve the members of your congregation. There are, however, unique opportunities for a parish nurse to serve as part of the congregation's ministry team. This booklet has shared just a few ideas to help you think about ways in which a parish nurse can use medical or health issues to share the Gospel.

For more information on Parish Nursing, contact Christian Life Resources or log on to their website at www.christianliferesources.com and click on the link for Parish Nursing.