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*Called to
Preach,
Teach,
and
Heal:*

*Parish Nursing in the
Church*

By

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Jesus called his followers to “preach, teach, and heal.” Walk into most congregations around the world today on a Sunday morning, and you will likely hear preaching. Walk into most congregations around the world today on a Sunday morning, and you will likely find teaching, through Sunday School, Adult Education, and other settings. However, walk into most congregations around the world today and you are unlikely to find an organized effort at healing beyond that of prayer and pastoral visitation. Parish nurse ministry is an attempt to reclaim the leadership role of the Church in Christ’s ministry of healing in the world. After all, almost all the hospitals in the world were started by churches. It is time for the Christian churches to reclaim their voice and vision for healing of body, mind, and spirit, community, and creation.

Parish nursing in its modern form emerged in 1985 out of Lutheran General Hospital in Chicago, the brainchild of their chaplain, Rev. Granger Westberg. In St. Louis, the home of the International Parish Nurse Resource Center, parish nursing began in 1989, and parish nurse programs now exist across the United States, in Canada and abroad. It is estimated that there are approximately 7000 professional parish nurses, working in paid or unpaid ministries in this country. Many of them gather each Septem-



For More Information

To learn *more about Parish Nursing/Health Ministry in the Pacific Northwest* contact :

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and area neighborhoods.

Who needs a parish nurse? Just about everyone, as it turns out. While older women generally seek out a parish nurse first, middle-aged and younger men, who are notorious for not going to the doctor, seem to be the next group. There is great potential here for preventing chronic illness! Parents of teenagers generally find the parish nurse next, helping their children navigate the risks of being an adolescent today. Parish nursing is neither exclusively for the poor nor for the rich – it is for anyone who has a body and a soul, and who is interested in spirituality and in health. Ask the pastors whose own health has been changed by the presence and activity of a parish nurse in their congregations. It is a movement that is changing the lives of nurses, pastors, congregations, and their neighborhoods, one parish nurse at a time.

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ber for an annual Symposium, to network and keep pace with developments in the field.

What does parish nursing look like? Registered nurses who work as parish nurses have a number of roles:

- **Integrator of Faith and Health**
A parish nurse assists parishioners to achieve higher levels of wellness by improving both their spiritual and physical health.
- **Health Educator**
Parish nurses are available for health education, and provide opportunities to learn about health issues, individually and in groups.
- **Health Counselor**
A parish nurse is available to discuss health concerns, emphasizing early response to small problems and encouraging healthy lifestyles.
- **Referral Advisor**
A parish nurse is available to provide referrals to healthcare and social services within the community upon request.
- **Health Advocate**
A parish nurse speaks out to help obtain needed health-related services.
- **Developer of Support Groups**
A parish nurse facilitates the development of support groups for the faith community and others served.

- **Volunteer Coordinator**

A parish nurse recruits, prepares and oversees congregational volunteers who help those in need.

A parish nurse's specific assignments within the ministry of a congregation are decided in consultation with clergy and other church leaders and/or a "health cabinet" in the parish. They may design an outreach ministry to the surrounding neighborhood, or a very specialized ministry, such as within a school. Most parishes, however, prefer that the parish nurse serves broadly in response to the varied needs of the congregation and neighborhood.

Consider Gayle Mason and Josephine Fields, for example. They are parish nurses who work for Union Avenue Christian Church and the United Church Neighborhood Houses in a changing urban core neighborhood of St. Louis. A few months ago, Josephine and Gayle discovered children "dumpster-diving" after school, going through area dumpsters and they noticed it was a pattern. Upon investigation, they found the children were searching for food. In a school where 99% of the children were living in poverty, the children were hungry, and faced the prospect of remaining hungry until the next school day. The nurses worked with the administration at the school and with a local food bank to arrange

for a "Kids Café" to provide a meal for the children after school, so that, combined with their school breakfast and lunch, they would have three meals a day.

Maureen Daniels works with a number of mothers who are living with diagnoses of mental illness, who would be hard-pressed to keep their children, their jobs, and their homes without a safety net of support. She is supported by a coalition of churches in the cities of Maplewood and Richmond Heights near St. Louis. Mary Ann Brischetto, who works out of St. Paul's United Church of Christ, a couple of miles south of the site of the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, is running a program called the "Positive Family Program" which provides parenting education and social support for parents who have landed in St. Louis City Family Court, at risk of losing their children. Joyce Lony serves as both a parish nurse and the director of the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers program based out of Eden United Church of Christ in Edwardsville, Illinois. Susan Naylor, serving First Congregational Church UCC in suburban Webster Groves and Centenary Methodist in downtown St. Louis, is a parish nurse and massage therapist, as are several other parish nurses in this area. All together, the 28 parish nurses of Deaconess Parish Nurses are overseeing a total of nearly 150 programs to promote the health and well-being of the congregations