What is the ministry of Faith Community Nursing (Parish Nursing)?

Faith Community Nursing (Parish Nursing) is a health promotion, disease prevention ministry based on the care of the whole person and encompassing seven functions. These functions are integrator of faith and health, health educator, personal health counselor, referral agent, trainer of volunteers, developer of support groups and 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, and administration of flu shots or medications. It is a professional model of health ministry using a registered professional 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 (Solari-Twadell & McDermott, 1999).

What are the different organizing frameworks for the ministry of Faith Community Nursing (FCN) practice?

There are four basic organizing frameworks for the ministry of FCN 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 FCN position. The pay for the position may be generated from the institution of 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 nurses services. There is a contract or covenant between the congregation and 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 FCN position. However, there is a covenant or agreement between the congregation and institution regarding the theological reflection and 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.

- 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.
How does one begin the development of a ministry?

Education on the ministry of FCN 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 health place in the community, health as being whole person oriented and more than physical, and the nurse as being other than the provider of medication, dressing changes and other physical care. Attending the Annual Westberg Symposium is an excellent source to learn about FCN and network with others nationally and internationally involved in FCN. Identification of local resources is also important. It is equally important to contact denominational offices to see what resource they may have available to assist in this work. Some denominations may have a designated FCN consultant for their denomination. Once the education has begun it is helpful to establish a task force that can do some of the basic work while keeping the congregation informed of progress.

How long does it take to establish a FCN ministry?

Often times those interested in developing a FCN 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 early work of mindset development and education can be time consuming. It must be considered that the work group will meet probably 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 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.

Why is attendance at a basic preparation course using the standardized core curriculum in FCN recommended?

The American Nurses Association since 1997 recognizes FCN (parish nursing) as a specialty practice. In 1998 and updated in 2005, The American Nurses Association published The Standards and Scope of Parish Nursing. It is in the 2005 Publication that term parish nursing has been replaced by the term Faith Community Nursing to be inclusive of other denominations. This 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 the practice. Additionally, most nurses are not familiar with working in neither a congregation nor the theological perspectives on health and healing. This requires preparation for the role. The standardized core curriculum has been developed through the International Parish Nurse Resource Center. The curriculum has been developed through the IPNRC by 35 FCN (parish nurse) experts from across the United States. This provides for a basic preparation of the nurse with content that over sixty educational institutions across the country are providing. This
curriculum includes content on the theology of health as well as prayer and worship. Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia has an excellent program that is approved by the International Parish Nurse Resource Center. There are other programs in Virginia also.

**How much does this ministry cost?**

The financial perspectives of the development and integration of the ministry of FCN 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. If the nurse is going to be paid then a salary range must be determined. Are there going to be any benefits included such as sick and vacation time? What supplies, material, equipment will be needed by the nurse? What kind of programming will the FCN be providing? What resources are available for that? Who will be paying for basic preparation of the nurse, liability insurance, and ongoing continuing education? Cost is an issue that is important to be dealt with early in the development of the ministry. Networking with others within your denomination or community may help in answering some of the financial questions early in the development of the ministry.

**What about liability insurance?**

Liability insurance is a must for both the FCN and the congregation. Coverage is available through many church denominations as well, as through other resources.

**What can I do to prepare to have a FCN ministry as part of the congregation I serve?**

Read the available literature on Faith Community Nursing (parish nursing). Re-look at Scripture from the perspective of health and healing. Perhaps enroll in a seminary course on health and healing and the congregation. This may provide a new perspective in which to preach to the members of the congregation where they are given the opportunity to begin to see how their congregation is really serving as a health place in the community. It is so important for clergy to be able to see the possibilities in revitalizing the mission of health and healing. The FCN ministry then becomes a concrete way in which to live out the call to preach, teach and heal.

**How many FCN (parish nurse) ministries are there in the United States?**

There is no answer to this question. It is known that over 7000 nurses have been prepared using the standardized core curriculum in FCN (parish nursing). However, there are many more nurses who are using this title and have not had any preparation for the role. More people in more congregations are able to access a FCN (parish nurse) to assist them in integrating their faith in addressing their health.
How can the International Parish Nurse Resource Center assist me in this process?

The purpose of the International Parish Nurse Resource center is to promote the development of quality FCN (parish nurse) programs through education, consultation and research. The staff of the resource center is available to serve you. It includes the catalogue of resources and other information that may be helpful to you. There are many educational opportunities that you may find helpful along the way.

What is available in the Virginia Conference to assist me?

In January 2003, the Fellowship of Virginia United Methodist Conference of Parish Nurses was established by Bishop Pennel. Since that time the number of Faith Community Nurses has exceeded 100 in the conference. The Fellowship can be accessed through Virginia UM Conference website. Faith Community Nurses provide an exhibit with blood pressure screening at each annual conference. If you would like to speak with someone regarding FCN please feel free to contact: Debbie Mobley, Co-chair of the Fellowship of Virginia United Methodist Conference of Parish Nurses. Her email is nursemobley@dmv.com and home phone number is 757-442-3776. Please note we have at least one FCN in each district.

The information contained in this document was taken from the International Parish Nurse Resource Center website www.ipnrc.org with some editorial changes and updates.