



Parish Nursing: Suggested Guidelines

I. Parish Nurse Definitions

A variety of definitions are provided to help you understand the role of the parish nurse. These examples can be used to help you develop your own parish nursing program.

II. Mission Statement Examples

Each congregation should develop its own mission statement before implementing a parish nursing program. These examples offer ideas on what a mission statement should include.

III. Roles of the Parish Nurse

The potential areas of service are very broad and need to be defined. This section highlights many roles of a parish nurse.

IV. Education

Although potential parish nurses have the necessary nursing training, they likely lack the unique course work that is necessary to understand and undertake the parish nursing role. This section addresses three areas of educational issues as they relate to a parish nurse.

V. Spiritual Leadership Issues

This section discusses the relationship between the parish nurse and the pastor as it relates to the parish nursing program.

VI. Legal Requirements/Limits

Some legal issues are briefly discussed. These guidelines should assist the congregational leaders in discussing these legal matters before implementing the program.

VII. Organizational Issues

A suggested conceptual framework is provided to help the members understand the way in which the parish nurse will fit into the congregational structure. Also included are some practical suggestions on several related issues.

VIII. Budget

The importance of a parish nursing budget is explained along with a brief section on establishing a budget.

IX. Appendix

Some practical guidelines are provided to assist you in evaluating the need for a parish nurse program in your congregation.

I. Parish Nurse Definitions

A variety of statements are provided to help you understand the definition of a parish nurse. The following examples can help you visualize the practice of a parish nurse as well as how parish nursing could assist the congregation.

“A WELS Parish Nurse (PN) is a currently licensed Registered Nurse (RN) who serves the congregation by promoting both physical and spiritual wellness. The parish nurse conducts a wellness-based and non-invasive practice, and the ministry is performed according to the congregation’s mission statement and under the direction of the pastor.” (WELS Parish Nursing ad hoc committee, 2005).

“A registered nurse, who serves as a resource person health educator, a personal health counselor, a volunteer coordinator and support group organizer, a community liaison and a role model for the relationship between one’s faith and health” (Westberg, 1990).

Examples of Parish Nurse Definitions

“A Wisconsin state licensed registered nurse (RN) who believes that Jesus is Lord and Savior, and strives to serve the Lord and His people through the nursing profession.”

—*David’s Star Lutheran Church; Jackson, Wisconsin.*

“The primary purpose of the congregation is to spread the Gospel of Salvation in Jesus Christ. In addition, a congregation serves as a ‘home’ and a ‘family’ to its members who have not only spiritual needs but also physical, emotional and psychological needs . . . The Ministry . . . is one way to encourage this sharing of God’s love and the growth of faith among those with special needs related to health.”

—*Christ Lutheran Church; Eden Prairie, Minnesota.*

“Parish nursing is an arm of the congregation’s ministry which concentrates on the specific needs that relate to the physical, emotional and spiritual health of its members.”

—*Christian Life Resources; Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

“A Parish Nurse is a current Wisconsin state licensed Registered Nurse who uses the nursing profession and her belief that Jesus Christ is Savior to promote optimal spiritual, emotional, and physical health of His people.”

—*Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church; New Berlin, Wisconsin.*

II. Mission Statement Examples

A mission statement succinctly states the purpose or aim of parish nursing in the congregation. The parish nursing mission statement should flow from the congregational mission statement. These mission statement examples are meant to help you develop your own understanding of parish nursing as well as assist you in writing a mission statement that would fit your congregation.

“The Parish Nurse provides current, accurate health-related information that focuses on disease prevention and maintaining a level of wellness.”

—*Faith Lutheran Church; Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.*

“The mission of the Parish Nurse ministry at David’s Star is to enhance the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of individuals throughout their life span.”

—*David’s Star Lutheran Church; Jackson, Wisconsin.*

“The mission of the Parish Nurse Ministry at St. Marcus Evangelical Lutheran Church is to convey the love of Jesus through a non-invasive, wellness-focused nursing practice.”

—*St. Marcus Lutheran Church; Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

III. Roles of the Parish Nurse

The role, or function, of the parish nurse flows from the Department of Licensing. The RN license is a legal title that permits the nurse to function within the scope of the Standards of Practice as issued by the Department of Regulation and Licensing. In addition, a licensed nurse (RN) who serves as a parish nurse also practices within the parish setting. According to Granger Westberg (1990), the following four major roles are identified as the core of parish nursing:

Health Educator: The parish nurse presents and arranges educational programs dealing with health issues. Examples of such issues include cancer, diet, exercise, hand washing, and medication assistance.

Health Counselor: The parish nurse meets with parishioners to discuss and listen to concerns. These concerns may be of a physical, emotional, or spiritual nature.

Community Liaison: The parish nurse serves as a “link” or “bridge” to community health agencies such as the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, or the American Diabetes Association.

Volunteer Coordinator: The parish nurse recruits, trains and supervises volunteers that are asked to assist with the overall health ministry in the congregation. An example would be helping with a vision screening.

Integration of Faith: The parish nurse serves the congregation with the concept of wellness (health) promotion through holistic, non-invasive means. Parish nurses may help members relate personal health issues within their Christian faith. The ministry of parish nursing may also serve as a mission tool to non-members who seek advice for a health concern. For these reasons, a WELS parish nurse may add this fifth role.

IV. Education

Required Nursing Education: The practice of parish nursing is, by law, the responsibility of the registered nurse. The nurse involved in the practice must hold a current and active license in the state of practice. Although the American Nurses' Association suggests that a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing (BSN) be the minimal entry level into registered nursing, an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) or diploma-trained nurse are acceptable. The nurse is responsible for continuing nursing education through seminars and conferences.

Suggested Education: A registered nurse considering a parish nursing ministry is recommended to enroll in a parish nurse course or workshop. Such a course helps strengthen the nurse in the "parish" part of parish nursing. This training also helps a nurse recognize the difference between a "nurse in the parish" and a "parish nurse." If you have difficulty finding a course or program in your locality, contact welsnurses@wels.net for assistance. Wisconsin Lutheran College has developed a 3 credit or non-credit online Parish Nurse Course. For more information about the online Parish Nurse Course refer to the Key Contact References at the back of this booklet for the WLC Chair, School of Nursing.

Although special training is beneficial for the parish nurse, there are no current requirements nor certifications for WELS Parish Nurses.

Spiritual Training: There is no required formal spiritual educational program that is established for parish nurses. However, the parish nurse must be a member in good standing of a WELS congregation or a congregation that is in fellowship with the WELS. The nurse should attend church services regularly and nurture his/her own spiritual growth through Bible classes and personal Bible study.

WELS has established a curriculum for congregational ministry leaders called the Congregational Assistant Program (CAP). The courses in this program serve well for spiritual training of parish nurses. For more information about the CAP, refer to the Key Contact References at the back of this booklet for the MLC Director of Staff Ministry.

V. Spiritual Leadership Issues

As the spiritual leader of the entire congregational ministry, the pastor is responsible for the spiritual growth of his members. As part of that responsibility, he should provide the spiritual leadership for the parish nurse program. Parish nursing can be a supportive component to a congregation's ministry, but it needs to be done in accordance with the congregation's mission statement, in cooperation with the pastor's vision of ministry and in line with the nurse's own spiritual gifts.

Since the parish nurse will be involved in ministry as well as health service, it is critical that he/she grow in the knowledge of God's word on a regular basis.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness (Colossians 2:6-7).

VI. Legal Requirements/Limits

Any nurse, regardless of the setting in which he/she works, is guided by the policies and statutes as determined by the state of licensure. Since these statutes vary considerably, it is neither necessary nor wise to make an all-inclusive policy for all WELS parish nurses. It is, however, wise and necessary to review some guidelines as they apply to the unique nursing opportunities associated with parish nursing.

Liability: The Nurse Practice Act and State Statutes of the state in which the parish nurse is licensed to practice must be followed. A violation of these standards of practice constitutes unprofessional behavior and may result in Department of Licensing and Regulation to suspend, revoke, or deny renewal of the nursing license. At the same time, the congregation must be aware and respectful of the standards by which the parish nurse must operate. Before a congregation implements a parish nursing program it is necessary to clarify any insurance coverage issues for liability purposes.

Other issues regarding liability must be considered before implementing a parish nursing program. HIPAA regulations, for example, affect the practice of a parish nurse. Good communication with the members and good documentation by the parish nurse help maintain a proper program.

Type of Service: Although the nurse is legally allowed to practice within the scope of the State Statutes and the Nurse Practice Act, the underlying philosophy of the parish nursing program supports a non-invasive practice. Examples of non-invasive efforts include a visitation program, health fairs, blood pressure screenings, medication counseling, educational programs or events, leading an exercise program, vision and hearing screenings, and such.

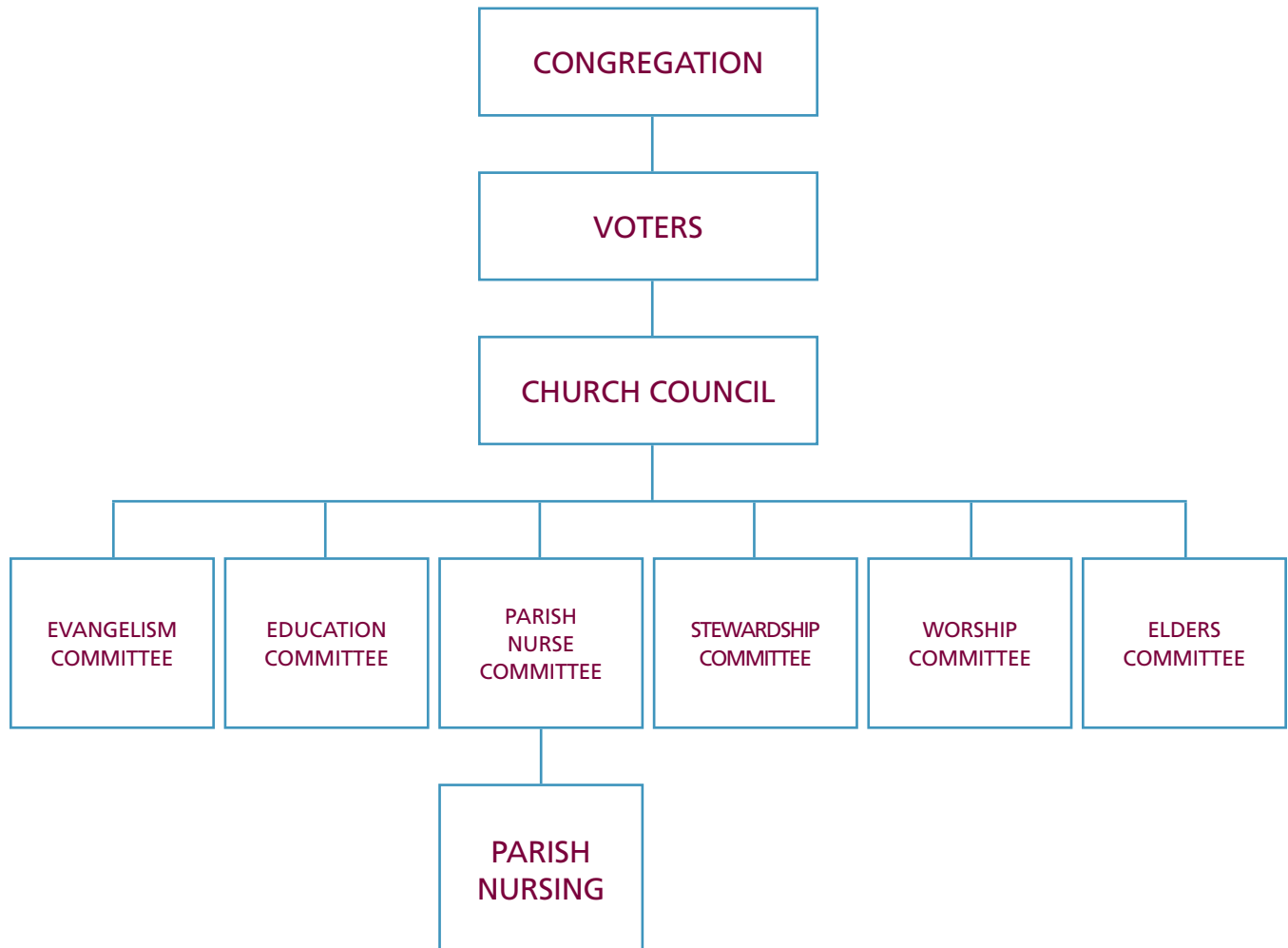
Delegated Duties: The parish nurse works within the limitations and scope of practice of the State Statutes and Nurse Practice Act. Therefore, the parish nurse is accountable for duties of delegation carried out in the parish nursing program.

Staffing: The parish nurse program is directed by a registered nurse who is currently licensed by the state in which he/she is to serve as a parish nurse. (The exception is found in nurses who are licensed in states that support the Multi-licensure). The parish nurse serves as a reflection of the congregation, and consequently, must serve in a manner that is consistent with the congregation's overall ministry.

The most effective parish nursing programs are teams that include a group of nurses working together. Although this is not required, the additional nurses provide broader service and expertise to the program. Non-RNs can serve within the program, but only under the direction and authority of the parish nurse and within legal guidelines. Examples of such service could include the development of promotional materials, creating a website, distribution of materials, managing a budget, etc.

VII. Organizational Issues

Organizational Structure: This is just one way to organize the parish nursing program within the structure of the congregation. The idea is that the parish nurse is under the authority of the congregation and is answerable to either a committee or the church council as well as working under the authority of the pastor. In some congregations, a Health Care Committee would fit under the responsibility of the Elders or other committee.



Each congregation needs to evaluate the structure for the parish nursing program to ensure that it fits in the overall ministry of the congregation.

VIII. Budget

Importance: The budget for the parish nursing program can be very minimal with the expectation that the parish nurse volunteers time and expertise. On the other hand, the budget for a parish nursing program can be quite expensive and include all costs including office space, materials, and salary. It is helpful, however, for the parish nurse practice to be a budgeted congregational item, because it established parish nursing as a recognizable component of the congregation's ministry and also offers the nurse autonomy to purchase necessary supplies or equipment. Examples of such purchases include, but are not limited to, blood pressure cuffs, stethoscope, first aid supplies, and office supplies.

Establishing the Budget: In most cases, a parish nursing program begins before a budget is established. Once the parish nurse becomes regularly active, the congregation is more likely to recognize the need for budgetary money. Learn the budgeting process and critical deadlines in advance, and then work to present your request in a reasonable and timely manner. Provide necessary documentation to support your request. Initial budget requests should cover reimbursable expenses such as travel and conference expenses. After a parish nursing budget is established, it is possible to expand your requests to include the purchase of supplies and educational materials. Eventually, the parish nursing budget could include money for outreach efforts such as health fairs.

Salary vs. Honorarium: Congregations usually follow the Biblical principle that a worker deserves his wages (Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18). At the same time, there is a great deal of benefit and reward in volunteering your time and expertise in serving the Lord through the work of the church. Very few congregations are able to pay a registered nurse a salary that is commensurate with her worth in the public setting. An honorarium is a way for the congregation to provide a tangible means of thanks and support for the work of the parish nurse, and yet stay within the realistic financial confines of the overall budget.

IX. Appendix

Questions to guide discussion in determining whether your congregation should start a parish nursing program

YES	NO	1. Are there members in your congregation who are not able to participate in ministry because they are less than healthy?
YES	NO	2. Do you have members who are chronically ill and due to their illness are not able to hear God's Word regularly?
YES	NO	3. Do you have children or youth in the congregation who are not getting Christ-centered information on various health issues — for example, nutrition, self-care, relationships or leaving home?
YES	NO	4. Do you have shut-ins who need more visitation, encouragement and assistance?
YES	NO	5. Is your pastor spending more time listening to member concerns about physical and emotional needs rather than sharing the gospel?
YES	NO	6. Are members talking to the pastor about serious health issues but refusing to see a medical professional about those issues?
YES	NO	7. Do you have health care professionals in your community who provide care or advice that directly contradicts the principles of god's word?
YES	NO	8. Is there evidence that some members are not seeing positive results from their medications, and is there a sense they are not taking their medications properly?
YES	NO	9. Do you suspect that there are members who rely too heavily on medication to get through their daily activities?

If you answered "Yes" to any of the previous questions, then a parish nursing program might be appropriate for your congregation.

IX. Appendix

Parish Nursing Start-Up Checklist

The pastor and registered nurse should meet to discuss the parish nursing program. Determine the action plan for implementing the program in the congregation. Using this guide and other supporting information, prepare to present the parish nursing program to the appropriate decision-making body in your congregation. The checklist below can help you through the organizational process.

ITEM	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DATE OF COMPLETION
Write Mission Statement and Role Description	_____	_____
Determine lines of authority and communication	_____	_____
Set specific goals for the parish nurse	_____	_____
Determine budget for the program	_____	_____
Calculate number of hours needed to accomplish goals	_____	_____
Choose facility space dedicated to the program	_____	_____
Select communication tools	_____	_____
Discuss training issues as outlined	_____	_____
Check into insurance matters	_____	_____
Make a list of members who currently have health needs	_____	_____
Develop evaluation tool for future use	_____	_____

References

The following resources are intended as a help for the nurse to establish a parish nurse ministry. These resources help with the “nurse aspect” of the practice. The “ministry aspect” of the practice should be directed by the pastor with the help of WELS Commission on Special Ministries.

A variety of downloadable documents related to a parish nursing practice are available the “Get Resources” link at wels.net/nurses on the WELS Parish Nurse page.

- *Parish Nursing in the WELS: Suggested Guidelines*. Fourth Edition, 2022
- *Blood Pressure Ministry: A Guidebook for WELS Parish Nurses*, 2017

Please feel free to edit and use the downloadable forms in your practice.

Other useful resources:

- *Faith Community Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*, 2nd Edition, 2012 ANA
- Hickman, J. S. *Fast Facts for the Faith Community Nurse: Implementing FCN and Parish Nursing in a Nutshell*. Springer Publishing (2011)
- Westberg-McNamara, J. *The Health Cabinet: How to Start a Wellness Committee in Your Church*. 3rd edition, (2002)
- Wilson, M. *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*. Augsburg Publishing House: Minneapolis, MN, 1983.
- Westberg, Granger. *The Parish Nurse. Augsburg Fortress*: Minneapolis, MN, 1990.

Each state has its own Standards of Practice. The Standards are part of the Regulation and Licensing in any given state. The information regarding nursing standards, regulation, and licensing may be obtained through the Department of Regulation and Licensing in your state.

“If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides,
so that in all things God may be praised through Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 4:11).

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