

Handbook for the Ministry of Parish Nursing

Archdiocese of Dubuque

What is Parish Nursing?

Parish nursing, also known as *faith community nursing*, “is a specialized practice of professional nursing that focuses on the intentional care of the spirit as well as the promotion of whole-person health and the prevention or minimization of illness within the context of a faith community and the wider community.” (1) The parish nurse addresses the physical, spiritual, mental, and social health of individuals. (2)

Parish nursing is rightly regarded not as a “job” but as a “ministry” of the Church, rooted in the healing ministry of Jesus.

Roles of the Parish Nurse

A parish nurse does not provide medical diagnoses and does not deliver hands-on care. S/he does not, e.g., perform any treatments, change dressings, or dispense medication (including non-prescription or over-the-counter medication). (3)

A parish nurse does serve as an *integrator of faith and health*, working to enhance understanding of the relationship between faith and health and wellness within the parish/cluster. S/he may participate in planning and providing prayer and worship services such as the communal anointing of the sick and the World Day of the Sick. (4)

A parish nurse may *arrange health assessments*, for example, screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes. (5)

A parish nurse serves as a *health educator*, preparing, developing, and/or coordinating educational programs on such topics as death and dying, prescription and over-the-counter drugs, mental health and depression, stress management, chemical dependency, nutrition and meal planning, caring for the aging, parenting, and teenage suicide. A parish nurse may organize a health fair or a senior wellness program. (6)

A parish nurse may engage in *visitation* on behalf of the parish/cluster, for example, to hospitalized parishioners, residents of extended care facilities, the homebound, or new parents. (7)

A parish nurse may *work with support groups*. S/he may develop and/or facilitate health related support groups within the parish/cluster (e.g., miscarriage and early infant loss, bereavement), or identify support groups within the community that could serve as a resource for members of the parish/cluster (e.g., Alzheimer’s support group). (8)

A parish nurse may *recruit, train, and coordinate volunteers* such as communion ministers for the homebound and persons in care facilities. (9)

A parish nurse may *make referrals* to health care services and resources within the community (e.g., hospice). (10)

A parish nurse may engage in *advocacy*. S/he may assist people in dealing with various agencies, or help those who need assistance in getting medical supplies or adaptive equipment. S/he may work with community leaders, elected officials, and agencies to meet the health needs of members of the parish/cluster. (11)

A specific job description should be developed for each parish nurse relative to the needs of the parish/cluster in which s/he serves.

Qualifications

Someone wishing to serve as a parish nurse in a Catholic parish/cluster in the Archdiocese of Dubuque must:

- Be a graduate of an accredited school or college of nursing , with a RN degree or higher. (12)
- Have current nursing licensure. (13)
- Complete a parish nurse preparation course. * (14)
- Pass a criminal background check, including child and dependent adult abuse.
- Complete the archdiocesan training program on sexual abuse of minors.

* Such a course is offered periodically at Mercy Medical Center in Cedar Rapids.

A parish/cluster may wish an applicant for the parish nurse position to have prior work experience in nursing. (15) References may also be requested. A parish/cluster may wish the parish nurse to be a registered member of the parish/cluster.

Specialized Knowledge

In order to exercise their ministry effectively, parish nurses are asked to develop the following knowledge base:

- Familiarity with the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*.
- Sufficient knowledge of advance directives to be able to make referrals for parishioners who want to execute them.
- Sufficient knowledge of fertility awareness based methods of family planning (a.k.a., natural family planning) to be able to promote this practice within a parish/cluster and to make referrals to NFP trainers.
- Knowledge of the archdiocesan Behold Your Child program for those experiencing miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death.
- Awareness of resources to support women experiencing crisis pregnancies.
- Awareness of programs for post-abortion healing (e.g., Project Rachel).

For educational videos, workshops, and on-line resources on these topics, contact the archdiocesan Health Care Ethics Consultant at DBQCHEAL@dbqarch.org.

Continuing Development

A parish nurse should be committed to ongoing professional development. A reasonable goal is to participate in one or two continuing education programs or activities annually. S/he should also regularly engage in personal spiritual formation activities. (16)

Contact the archdiocesan Health Care Ethics Consultant at DBQCHEAL@dbqarch.org for information about programs relevant to parish nursing.

The Parish Nurse as a Member of the Parish/Cluster Staff

Some parish nurses have full-time positions within a parish/cluster while others serve on a part-time basis. Some are employed by the parish/cluster while others serve on a volunteer basis. (17) It is preferable that a parish/cluster provide some financial compensation to a parish nurse for his/her services.

A parish nurse should be recognized as a member of the parish/cluster staff. S/he should be included in the listing of parish/cluster staff appearing in the parish/cluster bulletin and in the archdiocesan Directory. A parish nurse should be included in parish/cluster staff meetings.

In consultation with the parish nurse, a parish/cluster should establish the parish nurse's line of accountability, reporting requirements, and job performance evaluation process. In particular, the parish nurse should work with the full awareness of the pastor in mutually agreed upon areas of responsibility. The parish nurse should take care to keep the pastor fully informed of his/her activities on an ongoing basis.

A parish nurse should keep records on all parishioner-clients. However, these records are confidential, and should be kept in a locked cabinet or drawer (18) or on a computer secured by username and password.

Liability and Insurance

A parish nurse should have professional liability insurance coverage. S/he should determine if such coverage is provided under the parish's or cluster's insurance program. If so, it should be kept in mind that this insurance coverage only applies when the individual is working in the capacity of a parish nurse, and not in other contexts. (19) If a parish nurse is not covered under the parish's or clusters' liability insurance, then s/he must arrange it on his/her own (20), but it would be appropriate for the parish/cluster to cover the cost.

The following steps can and should be taken to decrease the risk of professional liability issues:

- There should be a well-defined job description on file for the parish nurse. (21)
- A documentation system should be in place that supports the actions of a parish nurse. (22)
- A disclaimer (such as the following) should be included in brochures or other literature and on web pages describing and promoting parish nursing in the parish/cluster: (Name) Church's parish nurse ministry is not intended to provide hands-on clinical nursing care, nor is it intended to replace consultation with or treatment by a person's health care providers. (23)
- A parish nurse should never attempt a medical diagnosis or dispense medication. (24)

- No activity that has even the appearance of performing a clinical procedure (e.g., blood pressure screening) should be held without a standard release or “hold harmless” form being presented to and signed by the client. (25)

Most parish nurses use their personal automobiles in carrying on their work. S/he must have a valid, non-probationary driver’s license. His/her vehicle must have a valid and current registration and valid and current license plates, and the vehicle must be insured for the state minimum limits of liability. All vehicle manufacturer recommendations must be followed, such as the following: the number of passengers should not exceed the number of seat belts; seat belts must be worn by the driver and all passengers; if the vehicle has airbags, children under the specified vehicle manufacturer age should not occupy the front seat. (26)

Archdiocesan Liaison to Parish Nurses

The archdiocesan Consultant for Health Care Ethics serves as the archdiocese’s liaison to parish nurses.

A web page for parish health ministry and nursing is maintained at <http://dbqarch.org/health-ministry-nursing>. It includes:

- A Directory of parish nurses in the Archdiocese of Dubuque
- Resources for liturgy, prayer, and spirituality
- Resources on advance directives
- Resources on Catholic health care ethics
- A listing of health care related pamphlets and brochures available for use in parishes
- A calendar of health observances by month
- Current events, including information about faith community nurse networking calls sponsored by the Catholic Health Association.

An e-mail newsletter is provided periodically to parish nurses.

The health care ethics consultant periodically provides continuing education programs for parish nurses.

The archdiocesan Consultant for Health Care Ethics may be contacted by e-mail at DBQCHEAL@dbqarch.org or by telephone at 563 556-2580.

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Notes

1. American Nurses Association, *Faith Community Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice*, 3rd ed. (Silver Spring, MD: American Nurses Association, 2017), p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
3. Diocese of Camden (New Jersey), *Vitality: Parish Nurse Ministry*, [https:// vitality.camdendiocese.org/parish-nurse](https://vitality.camdendiocese.org/parish-nurse), accessed March 2020; Diocese of Belleville (Illinois), *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*, <http://www.ministrysickaged.org/nurse.html>, accessed March 2020.
4. Westberg Institute, *Job Description for the Ministry of Parish Nursing Practice*. <https://westberginstitute.org/job-description-for-the-ministry-of-parish-nursing-practice>. Accessed March 2020.
5. Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses* <https://www.archindy.org/plfl/documents/FCN-GuidelinesMay2010.pdf>, accessed March 2020; Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*.
6. Westberg Institute, *Job Description for the Ministry of Parish Nursing Practice*; Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*; Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
7. Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*; Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
8. Westberg Institute, *Job Description for the Ministry of Parish Nursing Practice*.
9. Westberg Institute, *Job Description for the Ministry of Parish Nursing Practice*; Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*; Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*.
10. Westberg Institute, *Job Description for the Ministry of Parish Nursing Practice*.
11. Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*; Diocese of Camden, *Vitality: Parish Nurse Ministry*; Westberg Institute, *Job Description for the Ministry of Parish Nursing Practice*.
12. Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*.
13. Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*; Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
14. Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*.
15. Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*; Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.

16. Westberg Institute, *Job Description for the Ministry of Parish Nursing Practice*; Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
17. Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
18. Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*; Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
19. Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*; Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*.
20. For example, Nurses Service Organization Malpractice Insurance.
21. Westberg Institute, *Professional Liability*.
<https://westberginstitute.org/liability-information>. Accessed March 2020.
22. *Ibid*.
23. Cf. Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
24. Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*; Diocese of Belleville, *Catholic Ministry to Sick and Aged*.
25. Office of Family Ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, *Pastoral Guidelines and Policies for Parish Health Ministry Leaders including Faith Community Nurses*.
26. Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, *Driving/Transportation Policy*, Private Passenger Vehicles.