

# Starting a Parish Nursing Program

For those pastors and congregations who are considering a parish nursing program, here are some points to consider. Various WELS churches already have active parish nursing practices which are vibrant and successful! A set of guidelines for starting a Parish Nursing program and other valuable resources are also available.



- Parish nursing can be a positive ministry in your congregation and has served other churches in very positive ways.
- As with all ministries in the church, a parish nursing program would fall under the realm and authority of the pastor and the established congregational structure.
- Parish nursing provides information, education, organization, visitation, and other non-invasive measures. Parish nurses do not provide vaccinations, they do not prescribe medications, they do not replace the patient's doctor, and they do not assume the spiritual leadership role for a member.
- A good relationship between a pastor and parish nurse requires clear lines of responsibility and positive communication. Each party, as well as the entire congregation, must understand that the pastor is the spiritual leader and minister, and the parish nurse is a health care adviser. A parish nurse who recognizes a spiritual problem should notify the pastor, and a pastor who detects a medically-related problem should seek the assistance of the parish nurse.
- Most parish nurses are part-time workers in the congregation and often volunteer their time. Congregations should appreciate the time commitment that is given by a parish nurse and provide appropriate support. In various situations, a parish nurse will receive an honorarium or a small salary.
- A parish nursing program can involve many nurses who serve unique areas of practice. It is important to have one parish nurse serve as a coordinator, but others can assist.
- Due to licensing requirements and limitations, a parish nurse must be a Registered Nurse (RN). LPNs are not licensed to perform the duties of a parish nurse, but they can assist in the parish nursing program under the direction of the parish nurse.
- Most nurses carry their own insurance which covers them even while working as a parish nurse. Congregational insurance policies should not be affected when initiating a parish nursing program. A congregational leader should contact the church's insurance agent to confirm this.

Parish nursing, as a formal practice, is relatively new. Although churches throughout the centuries have provided health care through various avenues, there is a resurgence in providing our members with necessary information and support in the area of health and wellness.

If you have further questions about parish nursing, or would like help in starting a program, please feel free to contact WELS Special Ministries: [specialministries@wels.net](mailto:specialministries@wels.net) or 414.256.3241.