



Parish nurses help care for people's many needs

By STACIE CARLSON
Special to the Record-Eagle

Bringing the best of both worlds together, area parish nurses provide their parishioners with the link between medicine and spirituality. "This is definitely the best job in the whole world," said Jan Wander, a parish nurse from Suttons Bay Immanuel Lutheran Church. "There's an incredible joy in it. I love working with people. My biggest challenge, though, is time. There are so many things I want to do."

Parish nursing has a rich history. According to Wander, it began with deaconesses who went into the community to minister to the people. When hospitals came about, many of the deaconesses grew frustrated because they were unable to minister spiritually to the people. Parish nursing is a modern-day way for people to reconnect to these age-old roots.

In the United States, parish nursing originates in the Lutheran church. According to Dawn Dornbos, parish nurse and director of Faith Care Network at Faith Reformed Church in

Traverse City, Pastor Granger Westberg conceived parish nursing 30 years ago. He focused on clinics to address the whole person. Westberg believed that nurses played a key role in being able to minister both physically and spiritually to people — and they spoke the language of both worlds.

"There are over 3,000 parish nurses in the United States," said Dornbos. "I try to promote emotional, physical and spiritual wholeness in people through my work. I also act as a point person to mobilize the congregation and I act as a liaison between the congregation and community organizations."

Typically, parish nursing programs minister to a congregation's physical and spiritual health. Oftentimes programs take the form of education.

"Our parish nurse provides services such as blood pressure and blood sugar checks, and she's made emergency first aid kits available to the congregation at a nominal cost," said Jerry Bergman, president of the Church Council at Suttons Bay Immanuel Lutheran Church. "In addition, she's brought the Red Cross in for CPR training and

baby-sitting classes and recently arranged to have Lifeline come to the church for various screenings."

Parish nurses connect congregation members in need with grant money available in the community.

"I helped put a person from our congregation in touch with some grant money," said Wander. "She was caring for her elderly mother 24 hours a day in her home and it was taking a toll on the daughter's health. With the grant money, she can now put her mother in a day care facility a few days a week, so she has some time to do the things that she needs to nourish herself."

In addition to connecting the congregation with the community-at-large, parish nurses bring parishioners in touch with one another.



Maria Henshaw has her blood pressure taken by parish nurse Jan Wander, both of Suttons Bay. She is a regular patient of Wander, who offers physical and spiritual care to patients.

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those in need. It really allows people to connect with others in a very deep and meaningful way."

Parish nurses and their programs are typically met with overwhelming support from their respective congregations.

"The response has been most favorable," said Bergman. "The membership is not only willing,

but indeed eager to contribute financially to the different health programs and the ministry of the parish nurse program. The increase of programming in our health ministry has brought about a strong sense of

unity to the life of Immanuel. It's very evident in the visitation of our shut-in members by a team that provides Holy Communion — a program suggested and trained through our parish nurse."

To qualify as parish nurses, people need to hold a nursing

degree and take parish nursing coursework. In addition to their work as parish nurses, Wander and Dornbos have worked in a retirement home for elderly Jesuit priests and hospital and home care nursing, respectively.

Stacie Carlson is a local freelance writer.

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