



FLORIDA *Catholic*

Deirdre Krause, the new parish community nurse at Our Lady Queen of the Apostles Parish, assists Mindy Simpson at the parish health fair. (LINDA REEVES / FC)

Parish nursing proves to be vital, caring ministry

BY LINDA REEVES | JANUARY 22, 2019

Florida Catholic correspondent

Royal Palm Beach | Several professionals joined a gathering of ministers here dedicated to taking good care of parishioners in the diocese with a wonderful ministry.

One of these caretakers showcased her new ministry Jan. 13 at an event, and people were at the doors of the parish hall, where the event took place, an hour before the assembly began. Deirdre Krause, Our Lady Queen of Apostles' new parish nurse, said a good turnout of parishioners stopped by the Health and Wellness Informational Fair held Jan. 13. The event is part of Krause's new parish health ministry launch. She displayed information about parish nursing and ministry, brought in people from the community who distributed resource materials, and featured a blood pressure machine for those interested in a free test.

"It is wonderful having this ministry in our parish," said Mindy Simpson, who showed up at the fair early with her husband and children, hoping to speak with Krause and get her blood pressure tested. "I have to be tested every day. The ministry is a good service for our parish."

Parish nurses have been working quietly here in the Diocese of Palm Beach providing health and wellness ministry for more than two decades. Some are paid, most are volunteers, and all go about their work without fanfare making a big difference in the lives of parishioners and people in the communities at large. Many events that the nurses plan are open to the public.

What is parish nursing?

The parish nursing ministry varies by location based on the individual parish's population and specific needs. The one aspect that remains common is the ministry's importance. Whether in a parish like St. Edward in Palm Beach with its financially-fortunate residents or at St. Phillip Benizi, home to many poor, hard-working people with families and no insurance or health care, nursing remains a critical significance to its members.

"Faith community nurses are registered nurses who provide vital outreach, care and education to improve wellness of body, mind and spirit," said Mary Cleary, both a registered nurse and parish

nurse for nearly 15 years at St. Edward Parish in Palm Beach. Cleary is currently organizing a series of informational lectures with medical experts related to important health topics. The lectures are free and open to the public. She serves as chair of Catholic Charities Interfaith Health and Wellness Advisory Board, which met Jan. 8 in Palm Beach to discuss and launch 2019 initiatives.

At the top of the board's agenda is organizing the annual luncheon on to the public planned for April with award ceremonies. Awards presented include the "Faith Community Nurse of the Year Award." Nominations are now being accepted.

A focus of Catholic Charities Interfaith and Wellness ministry is to provide support for parish nurses and education for registered nurses seeking to start ministries in faith communities.

"This specialty practice of nursing helps fill a gap in our healthcare system today," Cleary said. "It is estimated that only one in 10 adults in the United States has the proper skills needed to manage their health. In our community, faith community nurses help people of all ages and backgrounds, often in crisis, live healthier lives."

Preparation and education

Registered nurses go through special training to prepare them for health ministry in the parishes. Parish or faith community nursing is one of the fastest growing specialties recognized by the American Nurses Association since 1997.

The preparation course provides the special training to prepare nurses to deliver whole person care — body, mind, and spirit. Upon completion, students earn continuing education credits.

This summer, Krause completed the one-week "Foundations of Faith Community Nursing" course with retreat at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach "through a scholarship from Catholic Charities," she said.

The preparation course developed within an interfaith model follows the standard curriculum developed through the International Parish Nurse Resource Center and Church Health Center, dedicated to promoting quality parish nursing.

"I became a parish nurse because God gave me the gift of nursing, so I wanted to use that gift for his people," Krause said, a retired U.S. Naval officer and advanced practical nurse with a string of titles after her name, including doctorate.

Parishes with the ministry

Wanting to give back in a big way, Krause recently started a faith community nursing program at St. Rita in Wellington where she is also a registered parishioner. "When I retired, I said to myself 'now what will I do?' I have a gift. I want to give this gift to the community."

Other parishes with new nursing ministries are Sacred Heart in Lake Worth with Nurse Eleanore Lindelof and St. Bernadette in Port St. Lucy with Nurse Carol Lindner. They head up a new team of numerous volunteer nurses with the support of Father Victor Ulto, pastor.

Other parishes with established ministries include Holy Name of Jesus in West Palm Beach with Gae Faraone, St. Jude in Boca Raton with Dolores Hughes, Ascension in Boca Raton with Barbara Bzura and Holy Spirit in Lantana with Trish Weaver-Monahan.

What does a parish nurse do?

Weaver-Monahan began her ministry in 2014 with Father Kevin Nelson, then-pastor of Holy Spirit. Father Nelson is currently pastor of St. Helen Parish in Vero Beach. The first year of ministry, Weaver-Monahan broke ministry records ministering to 978 people as the outreach took off. Her ministry mainly targets elderly parishioners representing a large portion of Holy Spirit Parish and its surrounding community, as well as the homebound and the hospitalized.

“From the beginning, I’ve believed that I had an obligation to our parish community to bring God’s love and presence beyond the walls of Holy Spirit, so my ministry is primarily conducted in people’s homes and at the hospital.”

On parish grounds, she organizes various screenings, education, and training sessions, as well as providing weekly articles in the parish bulletin that focus on current health issues and other topics. An important aspect of her ministry is providing resource information for families, some without insurance, who need medical equipment and supplies but are struggling financially.

“I have training in hospice nursing and Alzheimer’s patient care. Many of my patients have been terminally ill, and our ministry gives a presence and support for those parishioners who need assurance that God has not abandoned them at this critical time,” Weaver-Monahan said.

“Family members of these terminally ill parishioners are also given support and have indicated that our ministry is a blessing coming at the time needed most.”

She said her goal is to give parishioners a safe environment where their concerns and health challenges can be discussed openly, “that they are cared for as a whole person—body, mind, and spirit, and that they are aware of the presence of God’s love as they walk their journey,” Weaver-Monahan said.

A role model in the Glades

Sister Ann Meehan of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament congregation serves St. Philip Benizi in the very poor community of Belle Glade and has earned her angel wings and recognitions caring for God’s people in an area where people struggle financially. Sister Meehan was the first volunteer parish nurse to receive the Catholic Charities Interfaith Health and Wellness “Faith Community of the Year” Award in 2005.

Sister Meehan, a former Health Care District employee and hospice care nurse, reflected back on her parish ministry years that stem over two decades. Her parish’s flock and the community are very diverse with people of many cultures. “We have many very poor underserved in our church community, and my previous jobs provided the network I needed,” she said referring to developing lasting relationships that have led to assistance with her ministry work. “My first office was in the church itself as part of the sacristy. I then moved to the Catholic Charities building on Fourth Street. When that was torn down, I moved to the Glades Health Initiative Building, and now, I am a volunteer in Glades Community Organization and have office space there.”

Sister Meehan is a shining example of a faith community nurse. She fills numerous roles and keeps homebound parishioners connected to the church with her expertise and years of experience. She makes home visits, shares health education, helps people understand their medications and doctor's instructions. She connects people to resources in the community and organizes a variety of events, initiatives and classes including a health fair and nutrition program working with the University of Florida and the Palm Beach County Food Bank. She manages a diabetic pantry with the help of Glades Initiative and area churches that provides special items for people suffering from diabetes requiring special diets. "Today, I brought communion to six Hispanic members of our church," she said concerning the importance of keeping people spiritually nourished.

"These are the poorest people in Florida. Some live in small rooms sharing a bathroom with 20 or more people. Much education is provided. It is unbelievable that in 2019 in the United States of America that people live in such poverty, and it is a delight to be able to address the needs of the underserved. I enjoy and love every aspect of this ministry."

Bernadette Macy, program coordinator for Catholic Charities Interfaith, Health and Wellness, is available to talk to any pastor, parish leader or registered nurse interested in faith community nursing ministry. Interfaith Health and Wellness of Catholic Charities provides services and support to the nurses in the community although there is a fee for some educational programming. The association also provides on-going program development assistance.

"Parish nursing is a valuable ministry of the Church. Each ministry is different," Macy said, adding that the commonality of the team of community faith nurses here is the importance of "balancing physical, mental and spiritual health." For more information, call Catholic Charities Interfaith Health & Wellness, (561) 345-2000 ext. 256 or email: wellness@ccdpc.org.