

Spiritual Direction & Faith Community Nursing

By Anne Hand RN

We have heard and read that Faith Community Nursing is about encompassing holistic care into the congregation and wider community. Those of us who have the privilege of being in this role, would possibly have this in the forefront of our minds when developing and maintaining the ministry. When I am asked to explain about Faith Community Nursing, one phrase that comes to mind is: 'Caring for the health of Body, Soul & Spirit' or what I like to term, 'Pastoral Health'.

This lays the foundation for explaining in more detail about what the role may encompass. Each nurse will have their own story to tell depending on what they have developed through their own congregation and community. But what about the actual Faith Community Nurse? Do we talk about our own needs to someone and care for our own health relating to 'Body, Soul and Spirit'?

My nursing career has taught me many skills, one of which was autonomy. Being able to make decisions and then taking responsibility. These skills are of great value to me today as I develop the Faith Community role at Terrigal. My nursing skills however, are only one part of this complex and varied role. Doing courses to improve my pastoral skills, eg. Clinical Pastoral Education has been invaluable along with having a mentor to keep me on track and to help me explore new avenues to pastoral care. It is only recently however, that I approached someone to be my Spiritual guide.

The value of having someone to talk to, about how God is working in and through my life, has been a wonderful enlightenment. My head was telling me that I was meeting my own spiritual needs but my heart was floundering. Now, I have a new sense of purpose and in myself, an overall feeling of wellbeing.

For me, having someone to help reveal God's presence in my relationship with others, is adding a depth to the ministry. Through journaling, prayer and reading, I am learning to experience the very presence of God in every moment of my day. Spiritual Direction is about helping someone to understand God's personal communication with us and how best to respond. The more we understand this, the closer to God we become.

Spiritual Direction is also opening my eyes to the Spirit of God in me and then as I journey with others through their pain and struggles, I begin to recognise the Spirit that is at work. How can we fail? There is a sense of freedom when we realise that God's Spirit actually wants to work through us. This doesn't mean that the road has suddenly become easy. Hard work, discipline and not trying to do things in my own strength, continues to be a challenge. But at the end of the day, there is a stronger sense of commitment and fulfilment that can only come from God.

Faith Community Nursing has not only provided me with an avenue to care for others in an holistic way, it has also opened the doors to my own growth and learning. As nurses in this ministry, I feel that we have a sense of responsibility to be guided in our own spiritual growth as we endeavour to care for others.

To help find a spiritual director or guide talk to your minister or pastor. They will help you find someone who has had some training in this area or a person who may have gifts of wisdom or shepherding. The person does not need to be within your own congregation, or even your own denomination. I find it a privilege to be guided by a Catholic nun whose closeness to God is an inspiration and encouragement.

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