

Talk Ministry to Me

BY DAVID WARREN, PhD

Since this spring, the ability of the ministry to exchange ideas and information on CHAUSA has been made more supple with the launching of the CHAUSA Conference System, a collection of what are commonly known as "bulletin boards." You know how a physical bulletin board works: Someone tacks a note, article, or cartoon to the board; others come along and read the message; sometimes someone writes a response, but the people who share that bulletin board also share physical proximity and can take advantage of that wonderful communications tool, speech.

A virtual bulletin board, such as those found on the CHAUSA Conference System, works similarly. Someone writes a message; someone comes along and reads the message, and sometimes writes a response; soon a lot of folks have visited the bulletin board, new messages are posted, and new responses ensue; before you know it, various conversations are flourishing. Unlike the physical bulletin board, the virtual one does not force you to walk anywhere in particular, and you can, if you wish, participate in your pajamas.

The CHAUSA Conference System has two bulletin boards up and running. A general bulletin board, Member-to-Member, offers association members the opportunity to learn about and discuss issues important to the Catholic health ministry, while the Parish Nursing Forum gives parish nurses a place to talk with and support each other. Both of these conferences allow people who previously may not have even known about each other to collaborate on a common mission. Member-to-Member offers year-round a lot of what the assembly provides: It can become the gathering place for those times when we are not all gathering in the same physical space.

CHAUSA established the Parish Nursing Forum in response to a suggestion from Arlene Stepnick, PhD, director, parish nurse ministry, Bon Secours Health System—Hampton Roads, Norfolk, VA. The forum features a conference and also includes postings of materials for parish nurs-




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es, links to sites relevant to the practice of parish nursing, and a calendar of specialized events for the profession. This conference has generated much excitement among parish nurses. According to Mary Jo Bay, RN, pastoral nurse outreach coordinator, Penrose Hospital—St. Francis Health Services, Colorado Springs, CO, the conference offers "a specific mechanism to discuss parish nursing on a daily basis with others around the country." Like dozens of other regular participants, Bay finds the conference "thought-provoking and helpful as we all work our way through uncharted territory." The Parish Nursing Forum conference has already raised the concern that to remain viable the parish nurse ministry must demonstrate outcomes. Bay believes that the conference "will help us share our stories, a form of explicating outcomes." Other questions raised in the conference include:

- Do parish nurses need a professional organization?
- How can parish nurses integrate nursing and ministry? Is the practice in danger of losing its ministerial focus?
- What spiritual interventions are parish nurses using?
- What parish nurse preparation courses are available?
- Has anyone developed a conceptual framework for parish nursing practice?
- What is an appropriate standard for salaries for parish nurses?

The Parish Nursing Forum conference is already emerging as a wide-ranging virtual meeting space for parish nursing practitioners all over the United States to help each other. The asynchronous mode of communication and the absence of any restrictive agenda means this virtual conference has the potential to benefit many people in a variety of ways. □

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