Frequently Asked Questions
About Starting a Health Ministry or Health Program

What is health ministry?

- A ministry of the church that uses the beliefs and faith of the church, the compassion of Christ’s servants and the resources of the church/community to address health issues. It addresses the health of each church member whether they are physical, social, mental, spiritual or financial in nature.

- It can be coordinated by either a parish/faith community nurse (P/FCN) or by a health advocate/minister to help individuals or families cope, adapt, and/or improve their health. Help is offered through projects, events and activities offered to members of the congregation, neighborhood or community.

- It can be led by one person, co-leaders or a team of individuals who wish to share their gifts and expertise in wellness and health.

What is the connection between health ministry and the Wesleyan tradition?

- Health ministry is not a new concept as one-third of Jesus’ ministry was devoted to healing. Faith traditions have also established care for the ill and suffering since the beginning of time as the forerunners of hospitals and health institutions.

- John Wesley presented lifestyle guidelines to enhance wellness and healing in his book, *Primitive Physic*. He encouraged his preachers to carry copies and promoted health prevention as a way to stay healthy and whole for God.

What does health ministry do?

- Health ministry is tailored to the specific needs of the church by selecting activities from a variety of basic tasks that fit the goal and mission of the ministry. It can provide help not only to the congregation, but also to the pastor so the entire faith community can lead healthier and more balanced lives.

- Its main focus is on wellness and health maintenance, but it can also deal with crisis situations that arise with individuals, families, the congregation and the community. It does this by incorporating spiritual care into education, comfort care and other activities provided by the health minister, P/FCN or clergy.
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- Support is one task that can be provided to members, clergy and/or the community in times of crisis, grief or loss through home/hospital visits or other individual/group contact. People benefit from the ministry’s listening skills, medical knowledge and spiritual care as the P/FCN draws on the faith traditions of the church to help people cope.

- Health education can be offered via bulletin inserts, posters, articles, classes, Bible study, small groups or other events where health content can be added. Teaching members, clergy and community about health issues and their connection to spirituality and mental health can change behaviors and subsequently improve overall health.

- Resources and referrals can supply current information and services to those needing extra health care, hospice services, home services or assistance with health care decisions. Health ministers collaborate with other health service providers in an effort to offer more complete care for their members and the community.

- Coordination of volunteers and collaboration with other church ministries can enhance the church’s work as members share their expertise with new and existing activities.

- All assistance that is provided has the goal of creating healthier habits, better coping patterns and adaptive routines for a balanced life whether that assistance is offered to members, clergy or the neighboring community.

What is a parish/faith community nurse (P/FCN) and how do you become one?

- A P/FCN is a registered professional nurse (RN) with an active nursing license in the state of the church where he/she practices.

- A P/FCN obtains additional education designed to incorporate faith and spirituality into nursing practice. Courses that focus on the “intentional care of the spirit” as related to other nursing skills can be found at the International Parish Nurse Resource Center (IPNRC) [www.churchhealthcenter.org/findbystate](http://www.churchhealthcenter.org/findbystate) or the Health Ministries Association (HMA) [http://hmassoc.org/news-events/educational-offerings/](http://hmassoc.org/news-events/educational-offerings/).

- The P/FCN functions according to professional nursing standards outlined in the Scope and Standards of Practice for both Registered Nurses and Faith Community Nurses. These are maintained by the American Nurses Association and are the official expectations for professional nursing.
The P/FCN is a member of the church staff but is not a replacement for the clergy or other staff members. He/she may or may not be a member of the congregation, but should learn about the United Methodist faith before he/she begins, if not already a member of the faith.

What is a health minister or health advocate?

- A health advocate/minister can assist the P/FCN with the ministry or can coordinate the program, if an RN is not available.
- The individual can be anyone with expertise in a health field, experience with loved ones who have had health issues or interest in health-related concerns.
- The health advocate/minister is part of the church staff just as the P/FCN would be.
- The health advocate/minister should also obtain education to understand wholistic health, health ministry and the boundaries of care. The Foundations Course for Faith Community Nursing would be helpful but he/she would not be called a P/FCN.

How can clergy and congregations benefit from health ministry and parish/faith community nursing?

- The church as a family of faith can help each member achieve strong physical and spiritual health by offering support and encouragement when making lifestyle changes.
- A health professional/minister on the church team becomes an advocate for a healthy working environment for clergy and understands the demands of providing spiritual care in times of stress or personal crisis.
- Clergy understand the spiritual issues in life; health care professionals know the medical issues while the P/FCN straddles both—helping to connect the two for a more accurate understanding of health issues and the resulting health outcomes.

Our church is small, how can we offer a health ministry?

- No matter the size, a church is made up of people and there will always be someone with a health issue or family crisis that could use some support.
- A small church would need to keep things simple. Start by promoting healthier food options for potlucks, writing an article on safety or creating a flyer listing health risks. Other tasks might focus on individual assistance or support.
• Look at existing events and find a way to incorporate a health component into them. For example, a teacher might create a youth activity for an upcoming event or a session on hand-washing could be given at vacation Bible school.

• Multiply the results by collaborating with a neighboring church on a health activity. This would share the work, double the attendance and positively impact the health of both churches.

**What are the costs connected to a health ministry?**

• It can cost as much or as little as you are able—depending on the activities you promote and the model of ministry (paid or unpaid staff)—you create.

• Consider what role and tasks the P/FCN will provide and what tools will be needed to fulfill those tasks. Expenses *could* include office supplies, promotional supplies, reference books (health and spiritual in nature), P/FCN salary/stipend, mileage reimbursement, blood pressure equipment or other items.

• For funding, ask if the office budget can cover any of the supply expenses. For specific equipment, ask for donations or hold a fundraiser. For salary or a stipend, hold fundraisers or seek grants to cover that and/or other expenses until a time when the church budget can support the program.

• For programming and activities, ask volunteers to offer their expertise to write articles, present classes or organize events. Speakers and screenings are often offered by local hospitals or health agencies at little or no cost.

• For program expenses like written materials or food for participants, ask for donations from members, businesses or local agencies to fund the project.

**We don’t have a nurse, how can we participate?**

• A nurse is helpful, but you only need a person or team who is interested in health. A church has many members with various abilities who can help others, so encourage them to help. The only stipulation is that participants must work within the bounds and training of their expertise.

• A program will evolve as members of the team change. Focus on the strengths of your team and the needs of your membership and community. This will help with the development and life of your ministry.
What should our health ministry look like?

- The goal of every health ministry is to help people achieve better health. Beyond that each ministry is customized to fit the church’s demographics, culture, interests, needs and mission.

- Your program should be created by examining the needs of your church, the gifts/talents of your FCN/health ministry team, the resources available to the program and the goal of your ministry. Your program may need modification, if any of these elements change.

- Your ministry should be focused on the “care of the spirit” whether the program deals with member visitation, health education, support groups, community outreach or other health/life concern. It should be an addition to, or enhancement of, other church ministries.