New Faith Community Nurse Program Offers Holistic Health Care to Local Community

Susan A. Goncalves, Sacred Heart University
Sacred Heart University’s College of Nursing has developed a faith community nurse program in collaboration with SHU’s pastoral care services and St. Vincent’s Medical Center in Bridgeport. The program will provide wellness and prevention programs to individuals at the University and in neighboring communities.

Rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, yet welcoming of all faiths, faith community nursing is a specialty practice embracing the view that God’s love is expressed in care for self and others.

Sue Goncalves, assistant professor at the College of Nursing, says her vision in developing the program at Sacred Heart “was to integrate the holistic approach to health philosophy into an educational institution committed to the same Judeo-Christian values and philosophy. I firmly believe the formation of a faith community nurse program at SHU’s College of Nursing is our obligation as nurses and educators, as well as a natural solution to help bridge the gap currently found in health care today,” she says.

Faith community nursing initiatives arise out of a changing landscape in health care. Traditional health-care systems have difficulty reaching local communities to educate and empower individuals to pursue healthier lifestyles and health-care management. Therefore, these responsibilities shift to the community. Faith community nurses—registered nurses who volunteer in a church or parish—have taken up the tasks. They provide holistic care to individuals and serve as advocates, referral agents and educators on preventive care. This broad network of faith community nursing around the world has now been linked with and extended to SHU’s community.
Services range from routine health screenings to more comprehensive healing ministries among the sick, the poor and those spiritually in need. Central also to the program are role modeling and clinical experiences for Sacred Heart students who plan to enter the nursing profession.

Camelia Lawrence, MD, FACS

The program already sponsored an educational event, “Breast Cancer Management in the 21st Century,” which was presented by the College of Nursing. Camelia Lawrence, surgeon at St. Vincent’s Breast Health Center, was the featured speaker.

“I believe there is a direct connection between spiritual wellness and physical wellness. As part of our pastoral services here at Sacred Heart, we are committed to supporting all initiatives that will provide wellness for mind, body and spirit,” says Larry Carroll, executive director of pastoral services at Sacred Heart.

The faith community nurse program at SHU is an extension of the mission of St. Vincent’s Medical Center, which has one of the most active faith community nursing programs in the world. The program coordinator at St. Vincent’s, Marilyn Faber, oversees more than 250 faith community nurses in various capacities. Goncalves will be the contact at Sacred Heart for Faber and for Bill Hoey, who oversees all mission services and activities at St. Vincent’s.

“Faith community nursing programming is near and dear to the mission of St. Vincent’s Medical Center. This is a wonderful way of extending the mission into the community. We’re thrilled to be partnering with Sacred Heart University,” says Hoey.

For more information on SHU’s Faith Community Nurse Program, contact Goncalves at 203-416-3943 or Goncalvess47@sacredheart.edu.