

# HEALTH

## Parish nurses watch over congregations

By Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

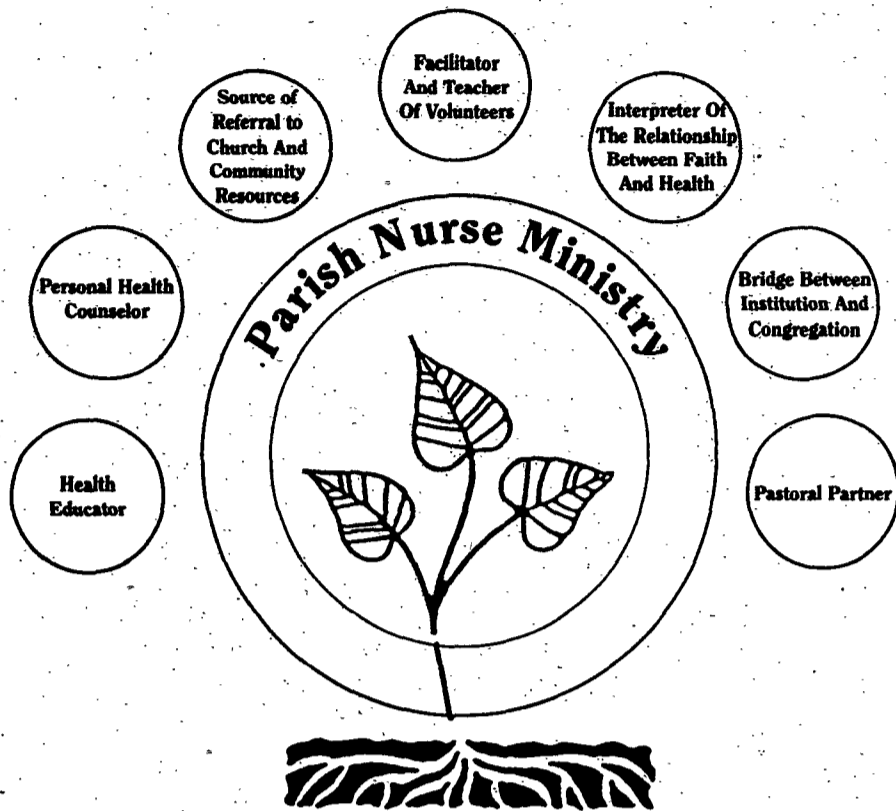
As common as blood pressure medication is, it is also common for people to question why they have to take it. Some also wonder, what exactly is blood pressure anyway?

These are questions Amy Parker Doty, a registered nurse (RN), often finds herself answering as a parish nurse for Rochester's Downtown United Presbyterian Church. It's important to do so, she said, because better understanding leads to better compliance with doctors' orders.

"I absolutely love the work," she said. She attends Downtown Presbyterian coffee hours so parishioners there can talk with her. She also visits parishioners at home, on appointments arranged through a coordinator at the downtown church. Her own church, however, is South Presbyterian Church in Rochester.

Doty has become something of a mentor for Catholic and other church members interested in a similar ministry. She is part of a network of 45 individuals and 16 churches, in an interfaith Health Ministry Network of Greater Rochester, established 1½ years ago by the Mercy Center with the Aging to support and train parish nurses. Among the 10 or more churches having or starting parish nurse ministries, the downtown Presbyterian church has what is believed the oldest such ministry — for some 20 years. Doty has filled the position for four years.

While the church at large may have a



Mercy Center with the Aging

long history of supporting hospitals and nursing homes, and providing help during crises, the parish nurse ministry movement — also called parish health ministry — is one gaining momentum today.

"It's a new concept but it's not," said Sister Anne Maloy, RSM, director of the Mercy Center. "We are called to heal the broken-hearted, certainly bring comfort to the sick and promote health and well-

ness, but we have not had anything organized.

"What I see here is parish health ministry equips faith communities to foster health, wellness and prevention. From a very complicated health system right now, it is very important people understand this."

With ever-changing health-care systems, people no longer even seem to

know what the three hospital systems are in the Rochester area, she noted.

(Currently they are: Unity Health System including St. Mary's and Park Ridge hospitals; Strong Health Care with Strong Memorial and Highland hospitals; and Vi-aHealth with Rochester General and Genesee hospitals.)

"The church is going to be asked to do more," Sister Maloy also noted, as health-care systems continue to change and the aging population grows. Parish nursing can help anyone of any age, she said, "the whole person — body, mind and spirit."

Nurses working through the parishes can link their faith communities with health services in the wider area, counsel, educate people and provide health screenings and other programs. They generally do not do clinical work for parishioners, however.

Parish nurse ministry is growing from the grassroots in the Rochester Diocese, Sister Maloy noted. Four St. Salome's Church, Irondequoit, parishioners recently underwent training for a parish health ministry; and both St. Rita's Church, Webster, and the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, Rochester, have parish health ministries. Those, and programs at several Protestant churches, also in the health network, vary on their approach.

The 19th Ward cluster's health ministry is run by two licensed practical nurses (LPNs), a doctor, two other parishioners and herself, said Gwendolyn Lowe, RN, president of the ministry. Four times a year, for example, it

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