

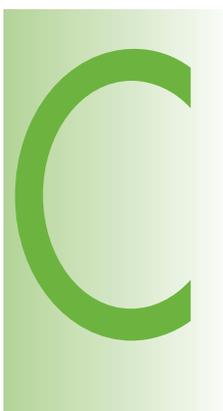


# What's *Unique* in Christian Caring?



## “God is my biggest resource.”

BY KRIS HALDEMAN



Christian nurse educators long to help novice nurses discover practical ways Christian faith is lived out in nursing practice.

Students may wonder, is there anything unique about Christian nurses? How do they integrate faith into practice? Does Christian faith make a difference? Another important goal is to build confidence in students' divine calling from God into nursing.

To help facilitate this process of discovery, faculty assign new students at Northwest University's Mark and Hulda Buntain School of Nursing the Christian Nurse Interview. At Northwest, the mission is to graduate schol-

arly professional nurses who practice from a uniquely Christian worldview and are dedicated to helping all human beings in pursuit of holistic health. We believe that graduates should be nurses showing Christ's love through hands of compassion.

The Christian Nurse Interview assignment has several objectives as part of our Integration of Faith seminar series. One objective is for each student to reflect personally on the vocational call to serve God through nursing. The interview assignment allows the student to observe how a Christian nurse seeks to integrate his or her faith into nursing practice. Over the past six years, since the assignment was implemented in the curriculum, 164 practicing nurses have been interviewed by nursing students. Each student conducts an in-depth interview with one nurse. Students find Christian nurses to interview through their churches, prior relationships and recommendations from friends or family members.

Early in the semester, students brainstorm the kinds of questions they will ask during their interviews. Many of the students' questions are the same

each year. Typically, they want to know if the Christian nurses being interviewed experienced a *calling* to nursing, and if so, how they experienced that call. They also want to know how the nurses cope with dying patients, if they have been asked to assist in an abortion, and if the nurse has any general wisdom and advice to share. Students primarily choose to interview staff nurses from a variety of specialty areas, including intensive care, pediatrics, hospice, medical-surgical, the post-anesthesia care unit and long-term care. However, nurses employed in administrative positions, educational and advanced-practice roles also have been interviewees.

Written papers convey interview information, and an oral presentation is made by the students to their classmates. Hearing the summaries of these interviews is a rich experience. Listening to stories of nurses who possess a strong sense of purpose in their work brings hope to students and faculty alike.

According to interviews conducted by students, Christian nurses have several common qualities (see table one). Students describe Christian nurses as “loving,” “caring” and “joyful,” after hearing



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stories of how the nurses care for their patients. The nurses repeatedly talk about “making extra time” for their patients. One interviewee told a student she runs in the hallways in between seeing patients so that she can have extra time to sit in the patients’ rooms and talk. One nurse said “spending time” with patients is one of the most important means of communicating God’s care. Similarly, another nurse talked about how important it is for her to listen as much as possible to the families in her care.

Another theme communicated during interviews is the need Christian nurses feel to rely on God for strength. Frequently, the nurses emphasize that success in a demanding and stressful workplace is related to a dependence on their Creator. “God is my biggest resource,” one nurse explained. Prayer is most often identified by the nurses as the means for accessing this heavenly resource. They recommend to the novice nurses-to-be that they pray while on the way to work for the patients and families they will encounter. Experienced Christian nurses report they continue to pray silently throughout their day for their patients. It is less common for the nurse interviewees to recall prayer *with* a patient, but students almost always are encouraged to “be ready” for the opportunity if it presents itself. This consistent advice regarding reliance on God and prayer helps the students meet another course objective of evaluating

personal spiritual resources.

Additional qualities nursing students have noted after interviewing Christian nurses include the call to represent God in word and in deed. Nurses serving God must be characterized by integrity. Several nurses gave examples of how their calling leads them to be careful to provide care in a nondiscriminatory manner, treating each patient and family as having equal value and worth in God’s eyes.

Some of the nurses have summarized their advice to the students in a simple manner, hoping not to overwhelm the novice. Golden nuggets of advice given to students by the nurses include: “Pray all of the time,” “Find a devotional guide you like,” “Study hard and don’t give up,” and “You will need prayer support, because Christian nurses are in the minority.” These nurses encourage students that his or her personal faith in God will simply “spill over” into their work with patients and families. They emphasize that it is vital that each nurse take care of him- or herself spiritually, physically and emotionally, in order to care for others.

One other quality of the nurse interviewees is consistently revealed in the students’ reports. The Christian nurses who share their experiences are

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN NURSES\*

- Loving
- Caring
- Joyful
- Reliant on God for strength
- Having a strong work ethic
- Saturate work with prayer (before, during, after)
- Silent prayers for patients
- Ready to pray aloud with patients
- Called to represent God in word and deed
- Possess integrity
- Give nondiscriminatory care (treat patients as equally valued by God)
- Give personal spiritual, physical and emotional care
- Are generous

\*Data obtained from *Christian Nurse Interviews* conducted 2000-2005 with 164 nurses by Northwest University first semester nursing students.

Table 1

willing to give of their time and energy to future nurses, as well as to patients and families. This generosity further highlights the nurses seeking to integrate their faith into their nursing practice.

Students and faculty have been blessed by the Christian Nurse Interviews. Students have written that the interview turned out to be “much more than an assignment.” The insights gained from experienced nurses who share their belief system serves to guide students throughout nursing school and as they begin their careers.

Although a number of the characteristics of Christian nurses are common to nurses in general, we’ve learned that some qualities are unique. The realization of and reliance on God for strength, the permeating of work with prayer and the sense of being God’s ambassador are distinctive of Christian nursing. Of great significance is that Scripture tells us these qualities produce results that matter for eternity (2 Cor 5:20)! ■JCN

## @ a glance

Qualities distinctive of Christian nursing are:

- the realization** of and reliance on God for strength
- the permeating** of work with prayer
- the sense** of being God’s ambassador