



Faith Community Nursing in Australia 1996-2016: looking forward to the future with hope

Our beginnings

In 1986 in the USA Lutheran pastor Rev. Granger Westberg reinvigorated the parish nurse role, which has its roots in the sisterhoods and deaconess roles of the early Christian Church. He wrote about his experiences in 1990 in a book titled 'The Parish Nurse' which circled around Christian nursing groups in Australia. This book was the catalyst for Marilyn Annells and Antonia (Anne) van Loon to prayerfully consider how this role could be commenced in Australia. As lecturers in nursing at the University of South Australia they conducted an inaugural public seminar '*Parish nursing - What is it?*' in February 1996 and invited Ann Solari -Twadell the Director of the 'Parish Nurse Resource Centre' in Chicago, USA (now International Parish Nurse Resource Centre at Church Health center in Memphis) to speak about the parish nurse role and its utility for church focused health care. One hundred people attended the seminar and they were invited to help shape this nursing role in the Australian cultural setting by commencing an association to ensure the commencing role met the legal and professional standards in Australia, and that the nurses had focused support.

Commencing AFCNA

The 'Australian Faith Community Nurses Association' started in May 1996 to commence the work of securing a future for the FCN role which was not only in parishes and local congregations, but in faith communities as diverse as church-based schools, aged care facilities, community care services and agencies conducted under the auspices of churches. An ecumenical advisory board were gathered of nurses, pastors/priests, doctors and other health professionals who sought to formulate a statement of purpose, a philosophical basis for the new role, and develop an organisational and management structure that would provide leadership, education, support and direction for faith community nurses.



AFCNA states its Purposes and Incorporates

The Board's earliest goals were the formation of a constitution and incorporation as an association (which occurred 27 May 1997). They decided that the purpose of AFCNA was to provide support, encouragement, and promotion of health care in the community particularly through the agency of registered nurses working in conjunction with faith communities. They would do that by providing



nurses with support, information, education, resources, professional standards and networking opportunities about pastoral health and care ministry. They would assist faith communities with consultancy, resources and education to enable them to commence, nurture and sustain viable health ministries. The goal being to bring to our community quality health and care ministry that met the physical, mental and spiritual needs of individuals and families, facilitating growth toward wholeness, without distinction. To do this they had to promote and publicise the faith community nurse (FCN) role and develop a professional network for political action and lobbying on behalf of FCNs with other health professions, business, government, media, churches and the community.

The Board began its work in earnest appointing Anne van Loon as founding inaugural chairperson. The association has been ably chaired since that time by Marilyn Annells, Elaine Davies, Leonie Rastas, Lynette Wiebusch, Heather Banham, Susanna Warner. We have had very able treasurers and secretaries in the past and Pat Watts, Maureen Jarvis, Elizabeth Flint, Jill Hutt, Peter Mellor, Heather Banham, Judy King, Jo van Brussell, Unity Hunt, Ken Elder, Vicky Legge have served in those roles over the years. The Boards first activity was to negotiate professional indemnity and public liability insurance to ensure the legal aspects of the role were properly indemnified. They took on the task of garnering support from nurse registration boards so the role was accepted professionally. This was closely followed by commencement of the educational requirements of faith community nurses.

Fact finding to improve understanding

Anne went on a self-funded fact finding mission to the USA to locate resources, curricula and gain first-hand experience in the structure of the role and its implementation standards in churches and parishes in America. She was given great support from the Parish Nurse Resource Centre and returned enthusiastic to develop appropriate resources and professional standards for the FCN role, cognisant of the differences between USA and Australia re socio-cultural norms, health care delivery systems, church size and financial structures, public policy and taxation systems to name a few. The AFCNA Board sought direction from education, nurse regulation and health policy experts concerning standards for orientation and preparation of the FCN. We were advised to prepare nurses for a primary health care focus as these principles were influencing all public policy directives for the Australian health care system. This proved to be sage advice and the AFCNA preparatory courses have adhered to this benchmark.





Demonstration Project

A pilot demonstration project commenced in South Australia working alongside AFCNA to develop a conceptual model of nursing based out of faith communities. Anne van Loon worked with a team using a participatory action research methodology to provide the practice with a research base to ensure professionalism and socio-cultural grounding for the fledgling role. In August 1996 the first FCN commenced her role - Karen Watson the parish nurse for the Henley parish of the Catholic Church. She was followed by Lynette Wiebusch in the Lutheran Church, Mt Barker; Pat Watts in the Anglican Church, Norwood; Chris Jacovou at Teen Challenge in Adelaide; and a team of three nurses led by Julie Brooks at the Catholic Parish of Mt Barker. The model that was developed has been refined over time, and it has become the of the AFCNA introductory course which is being refined in our 20th year of service 2016.

Introductory Course

The AFCNA Board began planning for an ecumenical introductory course and approached Luther Seminary (now Australian Lutheran College) for their expertise in the theological aspects of FCN role preparation, which they graciously provided. This first 5 day course was conducted in July 1997 at the Seminary and was attended by 24 people. Over the years have offered this course many times in Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, and assisted New Zealand with their commencement of the New Zealand Faith Community Nurses Association.



Newsletter

The newsletter commenced in May 1996 to keep people informed and networked with one another as they developed FCN roles. We have been privileged to have the support of wonderful editors over the years, including, Meredith Yates, Anne van Loon, Robert Wiebsuuch and our fantastic current editor Gill Prestton. The newsletter continues to provide contemporary information for FCNs, networking and education opportunities and is placed on-line at our website for the benefit of all.. All files can now be downloaded free in PDF form from the website so FCNs can disseminate the information to their HCM committees and use it to promote the role within their faith-based and professional circles of influence.



A library and continuing education offerings

AFCNA began the task of providing resources and continuing education to FCNs. We invested a substantial amount of funds from gifts and fund raising ventures into a resource library for FCNs. This library is located at the Lohe library at Australian Lutheran College and AFCNA members can borrow from their. We held regular continuing education updates, seminars, workshops and conferences over the years.

Developing Standards of Practice

National competency standards for registered nurses were first adopted by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC) in the early 1990s. In 1997 AFCNA commenced developing Australian guidelines for the scope of practice for FCNs based on the ANMC competency statements for registered nurses. The Standards of Practice for Faith Community Nurses with accompanying performance criteria began in 1999 and was completed in 2001 by a team of four nurse academics - Jill Hutt, Margaret Hall, Marilyn Annells, and Anne van Loon. In 2002 AFCNA Board added Privacy Act 2001. The standards will be reviewed again in the near future in line with the current Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's review of competency standards for Registered Nurses.

Producing a Resource Manual

We continued to provide resources for practice by developing a 70 page resource documentation manual to assist faith communities to understand the FCN role and assist FCNs to commence with legally appropriate document masters that they could adapt to their local situation. In this way AFCNA aimed to assure Nurse Regulatory Authorities and the community that FCN is a nursing specialty that takes public safety seriously by setting the professional benchmarks for appropriate practice standards. The manual was reviewed by a work group in 2005 after receiving feedback from practising FCNs requesting more user-friendly forms. It will be revitalised in 2016/17 and placed on USB so practising FCNs can download and personalise documents for their faith community.

Promoting Networking and Lobbying in Churches

In 1997 Board members began the task of promoting the FCN role and forging closer links with like-minded organisations such as Nurses Christian Fellowship, who have supported us over the years. We shared the FCN story in churches, at conventions, fairs and conferences, lobbying all the Christian denominations praying that many would grab the vision of what was possible and commence a health, healing and pastoral care ministry using FCNs. The role of lobbying within the denomination was eagerly taken up by some organisations such as the Lutheran Nurses Association who now have their own growing Lutheran Parish Nurse Network coordinated by FCN Lynette Wiebusch. There is also a Catholic Parish Nurse network coordinated by former PN Carmel Mcleod, and the Pastoral Health Care Network coordinated by former PN Leonie Rastas.



All of this work is being done by volunteers, with little or no sponsorship and this probably accounts for the difficulty in sustainability. AFCNA has met with leaders and churches at the local level, synodical level and at the heads of Christian churches level, promoting the FCN role and garnering the support required to sustain the ecumenical ministry of AFCNA and local ministries within each denomination. Some groups have been successful in receiving funding from international partners within their denominations, but most are not able to get the resources they required to invest in salaried staff to move forward.

AFCNA was grateful for the receipt of support in our early years from a grant from *The Fellowship of the Least Coin* in 2001 which subsidised the travel costs for promoting the FCN role in Western Australia in 2002. However, not having any financial sponsor has meant AFCNA is entirely membership driven. It is difficult to meet all of our members' needs across such a vast distance, but we have attempted to be innovative with our resources and have moved toward more on-line activity. In 2016 we launched a new website at www.afcna.org.au which will be developed further to have a members' section and on-line learning modules available over time.

Promoting Networking and Lobbying to Health Care Providers

AFCNA's lobbying continued across Australia and interest began to grow in health care settings. Many Board members were invited to be key note speakers at conferences and have provided consultancy to Catholic Aged Care NSW, Catholic Health Care NSW, Sydney Adventist Hospital as they investigated how the FCN role complemented and supplemented their health care delivery systems.

Promoting Networking and Lobbying to Government

The lobbying has continued with talks to government leaders at every level. AFCNA sent comprehensive responses to the *Commonwealth National Review of Nursing* and to the *Senate Inquiry into Nursing Education in Australia* to put the perspective of FCNs in the public debate over our profession. Several members have written extensively in nursing journals and presented numerous papers. AFCNA is also a member of CONNMO Council of National Nursing and Midwifery Organisations and provides commentary on legislative and review papers which impact health policy in this country.

The Victorian Branch of AFCNA

In 1999 a Victorian group began an AFCNA branch under the guidance of Carol Terpstra MSC and Loretta Skehan. They held their first AFCNA Introductory course under the coordination of Gill Evans in 2001 and continued to promote the FCN role across that state. Leonie Rastas and Susanna Warner have been diligent workers in the FCN scene in Victoria over many years. This group did not sustain sufficient membership and ceased in 2002. It is still our dream that the FCN role will be revitalised by local branches of the organisation over time.



The website www.afcna.org.au

In 1999 the Board approved expenditure for work to commence on the AFCNA website and we began to gather information and photographs to make the site useful so we could keep networking worldwide in this digital age. This was launched in 2000 with the generous support of Tique Bennett from 'Netcraft' Australia. From 2002-2015 Tim Owen became our volunteer website manager and maintained technical cover of the website. In 2016 Matthew Ralph (Five Quarter Designs) has built us a new website which the Board will keep updated so we can keep information fresh. Your contributions to newsletters and the website is valued!

Higher Degree Studies in Faith Community Nursing

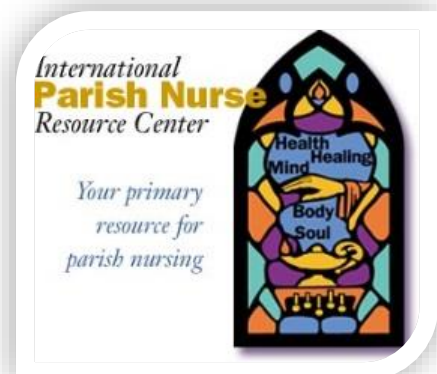
Although it was not an AFCNA activity the Board recognised some nurses wanted more in depth education in theological and pastoral care aspects of the FCN role as well as a deeper Biblical understanding. To that end Anne van Loon (Adjunct Faculty at Flinders University) began to work in conjunction with Australian Lutheran College (Luther Seminary at the time) to develop an accredited post graduate diploma 'Grad Dip Theology (Faith Community Nursing)' in 2002. This course was available via flexible delivery anywhere in the world. The course was reviewed in 2005 but ceased in 2014 due to insufficient enrolments.

Networking with New Zealand

In 2000 Elaine Tyrell a graduate from the AFCNA Introductory course commenced as New Zealand's first parish nurse in the Nelson Anglican Cathedral. AFCNA continued to supply the New Zealand nurses with existing documentation and support to help them set up their own association New Zealand Faith Community Nurses Association in 2003. Merilyn Annells spoke there in 2001 and it has been a joy to assist in courses in Christchurch in 2001, Nelson 2003 and in Wellington in 2005. The FCN role is growing in that country under the diligent care of a dedicated team of Christian nurses. We will continue to support one another with our developments and share in whatever ways we can to further this ministry with our neighbours.

International links

AFCNA has maintained close links with the Health Ministry Association (HMA) and the International Parish Nurse Resource Centre (IPNRC) in the USA. In recent years the IPNRC shifted to the Church Health Center (CHC) in Memphis and Maureen Daniels heads the FCN group. Anne van Loon has served as an international reviewer for the IPNRC curriculum in 1997 and 2000, and Anne and Leonie Rastas are Australia's representatives on the World Forum of FCN leaders which commenced in 2004. Several Australian FCNs have been to the annual Westberg Symposium for FCNs conducted by CHC in the USA. Some have presented at the





Westberg and HMA conferences, and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod parish nurse conferences. AFCNA continues to encourage and promote networking opportunities for all and looks forward to working together to continue to advance FCN across the world.

Supporting our Nurses

From the outset AFCNA has never ceased to field inquiries from all manner of churches and individuals and organisations interested in what we are doing. We have prepared over 150 nurses for the role, yet we do not have a large number of practising FCNs in Australia. New FCNs start and experienced FCNs stop. Although we are not privy to why they have left the role their feedback often says they were exhausted. This is often due to overwork, unclear or unreasonable expectations, and sometimes conflict in the faith community. Other common reasons for ceasing to practice as an FCN are changing family needs, returning to paid work, retirement - so no longer registered as a nurse, and no longer feeling competent to practice as a professional RN. Often these retired nurses will continue in pastoral health and care ministry roles. God does not waste the equipping work he has done within you! AFCNA wants to provide for our FCNs and have appointed a National Mentor for some years. In 2016 this is Pat Watts. Pat has been an FCN in the Anglican church for 20 years. Now retired Pat understands the many issues concerning FCNs. You can contact Pat via our email afcna@afcna.org.au and leave your name and number and Pat will ring you to discuss any issues you may have regarding FCN. Your debrief is always confidential.

What about our current situation?

Looking back we can see that God has provided for AFCNA. He prepared the way for us to commence the FCN role and I am sure He will continue to grow this ministry in ways that suit the time and context. For a small organisation we have achieved much thanks to the vision, dedication, and unstinting voluntary work of a small band of members. AFCNA is committed to doing God's work and we are relying on God to vision, equipping and energising to fulfil his calling, just as he has promised. God may be calling you to join us in this service. If so we'd like to hear from you.

With an ageing population, deinstitutionalisation and increasing community care for people living with disabilities, early discharge from hospital, financial pressures on the health system and increasing user-pays options for health care... there has never been a better time for churches to be the 'salt and light' God intended them to be in their community. FCNs and pastoral health and care ministry offer an innovative outreach ministry and a cost effective model of care to serve our community's most vulnerable people. Now is the time to transform your local community and AFCNA is here to help nurses and churches do just that. Please send us an email at afcna@afcna.org.au and we will chat and see how we can support you in this endeavour. Your membership and your donation enables us to keep this ministry going and growing, transforming health and delivering healing within our community.

Anne van Loon Chairperson

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