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## Faith Into Action: Prayer Shawls and Ministry

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## Faith Into Action: Prayer Shawls and Ministry

Every Sunday, I encounter the stained-glass window of Jesus, the Shepherd, gazing downwards to his left arm where the newly found lamb lies quietly, and I notice the others feeding on the grass at His feet. My feelings as I look upon this pastoral scene are like those of having a prayer shawl placed upon my shoulders: **thanksgiving** that the lost lamb is found, **completion** of the flock, **cradling** in a cloak, **warmth** and **softness** of the material, a sense of **security** and **love**, **prayer-like calmness**, and **peaceful** colours.

When I was called to Parish Nurse Ministry at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada in the autumn of 2011, I, as a Registered Nurse (RN), immediately enrolled in an InterChurch Health Ministry-Saskatchewan course to fulfill the requirements as a Parish Nurse. You may ask: What is Parish Nursing? Where does a Prayer Shawl and Parish Nurse Ministry intertwine? Parish Nursing is a service of ministry by a RN with unique and specialized knowledge, who is called to ministry by a faith community, affirmed by a faith community, thus validating the nurse's call to promote health, healing, and wholeness. The InterChurch Health Ministry (ICHM-Saskatchewan) educational program, which is offered through the Lutheran Seminary at the University of Saskatchewan, is rooted in the vision of Christ as Healer. The candidate must fulfill the core learned competencies as developed by the Canadian Association for Parish Nursing Ministry (CAPNM), a specialty association within the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA).

One of the first steps of the Pastoral Care Committee was to develop our Mission Statement as follows:

*“St. Andrew’s Pastoral Care Committee is committed to share the love of God by accompanying individuals on their journey to wholeness in mind, body, and spirit by ministering through prayer, service, education, caring, and support.”*

The Prayer Shawl Ministry had just been suggested as an addition to the current Pastoral Care Committee’s various ministries. Knitting and crocheting prayer shawls by a group of volunteers for those parishioners who needed comfort and solace began with monthly get-togethers in the church parlour. The prayers and blessings woven into each prayer shawl by the giver would become a place of comfort, solace, hugs, and covering for the recipient throughout difficult times; as well, as joyful, and contemplative times. Our committee decided to investigate a special label that could be sewn on a corner of the prayer shawl. We have one volunteer who prepares the label and within a day or two the prayer shawl is ready for its distribution, usually by me, the Parish Nurse. At a baptism, the Elder might place the white shawl in the Minister’s arms with subsequent placement of a child for the actual ceremony. The prayer used at the time of giving any prayer shawl may be as follows:

*“May God’s grace be upon this shawl—warming, comforting, enfolding, and embracing. May it be a haven ---a place of security and well-being--- sustaining and embracing in good times as well as difficult ones. By receiving this prayer shawl may you be cradled in hope, kept in joy, graced with peace, and wrapped in love. Now and forever. Amen.”*

We have included the following uses for distribution in our ministry: as a comfort before, during and after medical procedures, illness and/or recovery; following a loss of any kind; during

bereavement; baptism; and special events such as our Pastoral Care Convenor moving to another province and our Minister leaving for another call. There are many more uses as described at [www.shawlministry.com](http://www.shawlministry.com).

One recipient of a prayer shawl wrote this about her prayer shawl, and with her permission I quote:

*“I can tell you I use that prayer shawl to lie down and think things through. Sometimes it just keeps me warm and comforts me. Sometimes I pray. I have been thankful for it so much because it reminds me that someone loved me enough to make it. It makes me think of others that have needs far away and close by. Most of all it brings me closer to God. The beautiful turquoise colour reminds me of water and healing.”*

When I presented a prayer shawl to a parishioner who had left her independence in her apartment for a personal care home, not only did she love the heavy material of pink, blue, and white variegated wool but her comment included,

*“This will keep me warm when the door opens, and drafts come in. And it’s full of prayers and love.”*

During an extremely cold winter month, the person who labelled our shawls decided to sew all the smaller lap – sized shawls to become adult - size blankets. These were donated to our Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry where they were distributed to those in need. Our committee reassessed needs of our church members who were and remain front-line workers during the COVID-19 pandemic phases. We quickly made a list of fourteen (14) health care workers at St. Andrew’s including doctors, nurses, personal care workers, a registrar, and a physiotherapist. In April 2019, we borrowed the concept of a Porch Ministry created by our Christian Education

Committee. The prayer shawl was labelled and wrapped, had a Prayer Shawl Pamphlet attached with a thank you card, and then dropped off at the recipient's front porch. I did manage to chat with some of the recipients personally at their doorway at a socially approved distance, wearing my mask and gloves. Weaving our care, faith, religion, and presence through this expanded Prayer Shawl Ministry continued since that time through our Card Ministry at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. As Paul wrote to the new church members in the great city of Thessalonica in Macedonia,

*“Therefore, encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.”*

*(1 Thessalonians 5:11)*

As a Parish Nurse, I have been called to serve the Lord by serving others. The Pastoral Care Committee is a very special team of caring church members who have each accepted their call to serve in their capacity with their time, treasure, and talents. The Prayer Shawl Ministry is only one Faith in Action developed and carried out during these past ten (10) years at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon. Serving the body, mind, and soul of those whom the Lord leads me to assess and assist, gives me joy and thankfulness for the knowledge, skills, and experience I bring to Parish Nursing.

Author:



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Prayer Shawl Recipients