

GLOBAL LEADERS

Cast a VISION for Nursing

A JCN INTERVIEW

What is your vision for nursing? How does knowing Jesus Christ

impact it? What should Christian nurses be doing to influence the profession for Christ? We asked seven international nursing leaders these questions. The breadth and depth of their answers offer inspiration for nurses in direct care, for administrators, for educators and for researchers—stretching from the intimate care of patients to changing the world. While reading their responses, ask God to speak to you about his vision for your work in nursing.

—KSS



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Knowing Jesus Christ means experiencing him in every corner of my life. Meditation on Scripture and prayer are the source of my thoughts, deeds, relationships and work in teaching, research and practice. Teaching future nurses who will impact many is exciting. Spiritual dimensions underlie my teaching, such as whom we serve, why we care and how to integrate spiritual care with every client. Through research I explore God's work in people and nature, asking what, why and how this matters from

Christ's viewpoint. Nursing practice is a golden opportunity to serve Jesus himself as we serve others. For me, the most needy are the mentally disabled. The caring behaviors I use to serve them are drawn from the interpersonal caring techniques of Christ. Relationships I encounter in my practice are challenging, but whoever the person may be, he is the one Christ placed in my path for a specific purpose. This is how I love God and love my neighbor.

My vision for nursing is that every nurse should experience Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior and Lord and, in turn, be an instrument of God. I envision nursing as a life-receiving, life-promoting and life-accomplishing practice, where every nurse cares as Jesus cares for each of us—with a compassionate heart, competent knowledge and skills, a confident faith, conscientious deeds and a committed call to care. The client we serve is the center and core object of nursing, and may be overwhelmed by illness and death or in a confused, forgotten state. That's why the scope of nursing is wide and deep—not limited to curing and treating—extending to caring and to healing.

While each Christian nurse is gifted differently, all must be experts in our field of practice, providing high quality care. This type of care comes by

Seven international nursing leaders share their vision for nursing.

demonstrating God's love and integrating nursing theory, research and practice in the field. Exploring God's work in diverse nursing settings is equally important, along with developing and validating the scientific knowledge base of a caring nursing practice. May every nurse be the caring instrument of God twenty-four hours a day and experience the excitement of providing holistic care with God's help.



Sr. Mary Elizabeth O'Brien, PhD, RN, FAAN, AHN, professor of nursing, *The Catholic University of America School of Nursing, Washington, D.C.* She is an expert in spiritual care and a well known author.

My understanding of the call to nursing as a follower of Jesus Christ comes directly from knowing our Lord and Savior through Scripture: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I

was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:35-36). As nurses, we are blessed to have a vocation that allows us to care for Jesus as we care for our patients who are hungry and thirsty, strangers and ill, and, for some, imprisoned in a home, hospital or nursing home. The blessing and the importance of our ministry is reflected in Jesus' promise: "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple . . . none of these will lose their reward" (Mt 10:42). Christian nurses are called to give each person they serve a "cup of cold water" in Jesus' name; that is the heart of the Christian nurse's calling.

My vision for nursing comes from Paul's biblical teaching that those who know Jesus possess a great treasure. Paul reminds us, however, that it is a treasure held in "clay jars," so that it may be clear that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us (2 Cor 4:7). This message gives us the mandate to let the light of Christ, which has shone in our hearts, be reflected in all activities of our nursing ministry. These activities may be the academic work of teaching and writing, the leadership roles of administra-

tion and management or the treasured ministry of direct, hands-on care. No matter how great or how small the action, whether it be applauded or hidden and known only to a nurse and a patient, caring behavior carried out in the name of Jesus is a precious act of Christian ministry. For, as the teaching of Paul assures us, while we ourselves are only "clay jars," we are the vessels through which the "living waters" of Jesus Christ flow (Jn 7:37-39).

By attempting to live out scriptural teachings to the best of our abilities, Christian nurses can profoundly influence the profession for Jesus Christ. In this era of complex health care systems fraught with political, financial and ethical dilemmas, the practice of the Christian nurse must stand out as a shining beacon of selfless commitment to the needs of others as mandated by Jesus. Christian nurses must be leaders in the art and science of loving care and compassion in whatever arena of practice they find themselves. At times this may take a toll on the Christian nurse, physically and emotionally, but the gospel teaches that although suffering may be associated with Christian ministry, the reward will be great. Paul reminds all Christians: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not

destroyed . . . because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence” (2 Cor 4:8-9, 14).



Beverly Malone, PhD, RN, FAAN, general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, United Kingdom, past-president of the American Nurses Association, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

My experience of nursing is framed within my faith—I have no vision without Jesus Christ. Without him I struggle with the enormity of the needs of all humans, and my frailty and inadequacy to conquer illness and death. The knowledge and strength of my Christian heritage prepares me for initiatives considered impossible, health situations thought to be irreversible and loss of life believed to be irretrievable. These become doable through knowing Jesus as mentor and role model. When Jesus walked the earth, he was an ophthalmology nurse who gave sight to the blind, an orthopedic nurse who caused the lame to walk and a psychiatric mental health nurse who restored individuals to new life. With Christ, I can be delayed in my health care mission but never defeated. With Christ, I can demonstrate my Christian commitment in my interactions, making the opportunity to be heard in a diverse world of professionals who can identify

the spirituality of healing but may not be able to attribute the gift to the Creator.

My vision for nursing is that we are a healing resource for the world. Nurses provide more than 80 percent of all direct care worldwide, yet frequently when world health is discussed, nurses are not involved. At times the emphasis on what we do leaves no room in the public’s perception for what we know and our ability to maximize the knowing and doing of others. However, our in-depth client relationships enable us to be effective health care leaders with

peace that is skillfully communicated through words and behavior. We should be identified as Christians by the way we communicate God’s love and mutual respect across race, age, sex, faith and other areas of diversity.

As nurses, we have earned *legitimate power* in our license to practice where our state or country has authorized our ability to give safe, competent care. But we have been given a far greater legitimacy through the blood of Christ as we were bought and paid for by every bruise and wound that he suffered. Because Christ died to take the punish-

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individuals, communities and nations. In my vision, there is no service without effective decision-making in which nurses are key players.

With a vision of nursing shaping and leading in health care, public health could lead the world’s health agenda. Countries could spend more health care dollars on prevention of illness, extending lives and improving the quality of life, from conception to death. I see nurses as designers, monitors and caregivers in this health care system.

To accomplish this, Christian nurses should daily demonstrate the power of Jesus Christ. Four types of power provide the opportunity to influence for Christ: *informational*, *legitimate*, *charismatic* and *extended*.

Informational power should be of the highest order for Christian nurses. All Christian nurses should have a strategic message of hope, salvation and eternal

ment for our wrongdoing (Rom 4:25), when we believe in and accept him, we become God’s people (Jn 1:12-13), empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). To know that we are duly authorized to work for God’s kingdom on earth is a powerful privilege and blessing.

Charismatic power is showing the joy we have in serving Christ. Christian nurses, like Christ, should have a sweet passion for delivering quality care to patients, with smile power and pure enjoyment in healing. We should inspire and encourage.

Extended power is inviting others to join God’s family. It is not enough that we are heirs to the incredible power of a living Savior; we must share it, pointing the way to salvation and praising the Son of God, Jesus Christ. An old spiritual says, “I said I wasn’t going to tell nobody, but I couldn’t keep it to myself.” Christian nurses should share this joy.

My hope is that nurses will recapture and reignite the vision of nursing as a healing art.



Virginia Ohlson, PhD, RN, FAAN, is professor emerita at the College of Nursing, University of Illinois at Chicago. Virginia was active in the formation of Nurses Christian Fellowship in the U.S. and Japan, and widely honored in international nursing. Interviewed by Beverly Hancock, August 2003.

In my former nursing practice, knowing Jesus enabled me to provide compassionate care to my patients and be close to those who had serious illnesses and knew that they were dying. If I became a friend to a patient, I could talk to him about his faith. I tried to make Jesus real to my patients, especially those who indicated they did not know him or believe in him.

Our role in nursing is to serve others. Jesus told his disciples that they should serve those in need. In my day, many Christians pursued nursing because they wanted to help people. Because of Christ, we had the urge to care for those who were sick. Nurses today need to remain faithful to the call to serve.

I am concerned about today's health care situation, where care is financially driven. Christian nurses

with a vision for ministry have difficulty doing for people what they know Jesus wants them to do. It is worrisome to realize nurses leave patient care because of discouragement and frustration. Institutional leaders need to recognize nurses for their expertise, experience and ability to meet high standards of patient care, and create an environment where nurses can practice real nursing.

An important way to influence health care is for Christian nurses to join their professional and clinical practice organizations. Be a member, be friends with and support the leaders, and be willing to take responsibility to help those organizations become all they can be.



Sr. Rosemary Donley, PhD, RN, C-ANP, FAAN, professor, director of Community/Public Health Nursing Graduate Program, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.; board of trustees, The Catholic Health Association, past president, Sigma Theta Tau International and National League for Nursing.

My knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ influences my life

and all its activities. I was a novice in the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill when my religious community asked me to be a nurse. My first experience of nursing education and my early formation for religious life occurred simultaneously. These two aspects of my life, religious and professional, intermingled. My view of the person and sense of his or her dignity flows from my religious beliefs. The ethos of nursing in the early sixties, when I was a student in a diploma program, supported my Judeo-Christian beliefs that the person was made in the image of God. When I care for a patient, especially a patient who is not pleasant, I believe that I minister to Christ. I also find that my religious experience helps me to understand and assist patients who are suffering or troubled.

My practice is with chronically ill people. These individuals live with uncertainty. Often they have pain, limited mobility or some sensory impairment. I have worked to ease their suffering, to be present with them and to help them find meaning in their illnesses. My religious insights have increased my compassion and patience. My religious beliefs about justice and the rights of people have motivated me to work for a better health care system. Today, I work to secure access to health care for the 43.6 million people in our country without health insurance.

I believe nursing is a vocation, a special calling to assist the sick and to work for a better and just society. As a nurse, I have been educated and socialized to prevent and to treat illness, to care for the sick and to manage their illness experience. Education and professional associations have expanded my opportunities to achieve these goals through practice, education, research and policy development.

My vision of nursing as a calling, a

profession and a ministry urges me to be prepared and competent, to act in the best interest of patients and students, to collaborate with others to assure access and quality care for patients and their families and to educate the next generation of nurses to practice in a more just health care system.



Charlotte Eliopoulos, PhD, RN, MPH, ND, *past-president, American Holistic Nurses' Association, author, speaker, specialist in Holistic Chronic Care Nursing.*

Prior to knowing Jesus Christ, I had tunnel vision regarding nursing. As do many nurses, I entered the profession motivated by a desire to help people. Initially, I put patients first, and I wouldn't hesitate to bend the rules and challenge the system if it meant patients were better served. However, as I advanced, I became focused on structures, outcomes, adhering to policies, career advancement, cost-effectiveness and other issues that served the health care system, the profession and me. I was impatient with colleagues who chose not to climb the career ladder or help assure corporate success. When in administrative positions, I became somewhat intolerant of subordinates whose personal suffering interfered with job performance or who weren't *efficient enough* to finish tasks on schedule.

My vision expanded remarkably when I allowed Christ into my life.

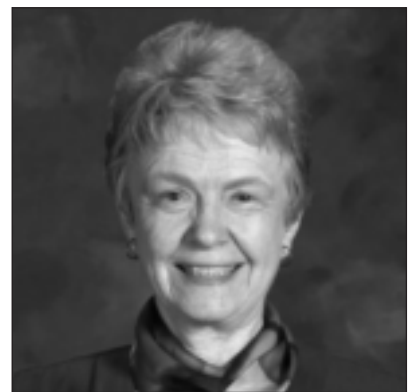
Through Jesus' example, I understood holistic care in a new way and gained an appreciation for the profound interrelationship of body, mind and spirit. I realized that using aseptic technique to close a wound and administering a medication on schedule weren't enough. Time and effort had to be devoted to ministering to suffering spirits. My *doing* could contribute to positive physical outcomes, but my *being* was crucial to the connection with minds and spirits that fostered healing.

Walking with Christ redefined my priorities. Being top in my field, holding a high-power, high-status position doesn't seem as important as serving. I no longer feel that I'm too important or too educated to answer a request for help or to offer time for those who are devalued by society. I take the time to examine how I can minister to nurses, nursing assistants and others who provide care, to lighten their loads, offer a word of encouragement and recognize the ways their daily contributions impact lives.

My hope is that nurses will recapture and reignite the vision of nursing as a healing art. This may require taking bold, highly visible actions to effect change in the health care system. We have been witness to insurers, accountants, administrators and planners defining care, quality and our roles. Rather than viewing each patient encounter as a blank canvas on which we use our special gifts to create a unique and beautiful image of healing, we settle for a paint-by-numbers style of care. I believe that with work and commitment, nurses can recapture the healing aspects that set us apart.

Christian nurses have a special role in influencing the profession for Jesus Christ. We do this by having courage to proclaim Christ as our Savior and by sharing our stories in welcoming

language and styles. More importantly, we influence by practicing the way Jesus would if he were in our shoes. It means: Answering a call light in a room to which we're not assigned. Being willing to sit down, hold a hand, and say, "Why don't you tell me what is on your mind?" when it would be easy to accept the person's comment, "Oh, I'm okay." Finding a blessing in a situation rather than complaining. Honoring our God-given life by committing to positive self-care practices and encouraging colleagues to do the same. Sharing our time, talents and money to aid those in need. Starting each shift with prayer for staff and patients, and inviting others to join us. Loving the unlovable. And, by following Christ's example at the temple (Mt 21:12-13), being brave enough to turn the tables over and effect change when we see inadequate resources, fragmented care, rationing of services and other practices in our health care system that are not right. By living out our ordinary lives in extraordinary ways, we can leave the sweet fragrance and everlasting light of Jesus Christ wherever we go and cast an enlightened vision for nursing.



Mary Thompson, MSN, RN, *director, Nurses Christian Fellowship® , USA, a ministry partner of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®; president, Nurses Christian Fellowship International.*

Caring is the essence of nursing, but caring needs substance and a source.

Jesus Christ is that substance and source in multiple ways. His care for us prepares us to care for others. His example of treating people with dignity and being aware of their physical, emotional and spiritual needs motivates us to care for others as he does. He valued developing and empowering people. He demonstrated compassion for suffering people and justice for the disenfranchised. Luke 4:18-19 describes Jesus' ministry of communicating good news and freedom to people affected by brokenness. Jesus shapes our values, anointing us to represent him among those who are poor and captive, and who lack physical, psychosocial and spiritual health. Jesus is a leader we can trust and follow (Mt 12:15-21). He heals, serves, proclaims what is right, brings peace, encourages and is the source of hope for all people.

I have a vision for nursing to be a Christ-centered ministry. Nursing is an avenue for us to be a part of what God has been doing throughout history, caring for those who are suffering and in need of health (Is 42:1-9, 61:1-4). Through nursing care that represents Jesus, people can discover that God cares and is present with them. Nurses practicing Christ-centered nursing, in collaboration with other colleagues in health care, have profound potential to make a difference in the moral and ethical issues in nursing and health care. God can transform nursing and health care through nurses who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to represent Christ.

The images of salt and light in Matthew 5:13-15 provide direction for how we are to represent Jesus in nursing. Salt preserves, brings out inherent flavor and creates thirst. Our lives should demonstrate these same characteristics. Biblical values preserve

our Christian heritage in nursing and bring vital direction to our profession. Christian attitudes and behavior infuse peace, joy and hope within nursing environments and help nurses find fulfillment in their work. When we act like Christ, we make others thirsty to understand and know Jesus.

Light reveals, heals and dispels darkness and fear. Our good deeds reveal God's character and standards for

in a nursing organization. Actively participate in solutions for nursing problems. Third, "pray to the Lord [for the city]" (Jer. 29:7). We must ask God to work where we practice nursing, and pray for nursing and health care leaders, as well as for local, national and international issues that need Christian influence.

Fourth, "do not let [others] deceive you" (Jer 29:8). We must understand a

The practice of the Christian nurse must stand out as a shining beacon of selfless commitment.

what is right. Being light may include being used by God to help heal wounds in people's lives and relationships. The light of God's wisdom reveals truth and discernment about faulty perception and ways of thinking that breed anxiety.

Is there specific direction for how Christian nurses should influence people, ideas and structures in nursing and health care? Jeremiah 29:1-11 records a letter sent to exiles living in a culture with values that differed from those of followers of God. God's Word to those people is helpful to us today. God told them to do six things:

One, he said to "build houses and live in them" (Jer 29:5). This could be interpreted as getting involved in building healthy environments where we practice nursing and to practice with integrity and faithfulness. Two, he told them to "seek the welfare of the city" (Jer 29:7), which could mean encouraging positive changes in our city of nursing. Consider serving on a committee in your institution or

biblical view of nursing to help us discern values, ideas and actions inconsistent with following God. Learn more about the Christian worldview and pray with other Christians, encouraging one another to live out Christian beliefs with grace and truth.¹ Fifth, know that God has plans "to give you a future with hope" (Jer 29:11). As we seek God in Bible study, prayer and fellowship with other Christians, we can expect God to provide direction and show us how to be a Christian influence in our world.

Finally, God tells us to "search for me" (Jer 29:13). God desires and is able to transform nursing and health care. He will give direction as we pray and seek him with all our hearts (2 Chron 7:14). God is gathering Christian nurses from all nations to worship and honor the Lord Almighty. It is exciting to envision what will happen! ■JCN

¹Resources for studying the Christian worldview and praying for nursing can be found on the Nurses Christian Fellowship website at www.ncf-jcn.org.