

# START NCF

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A Leader's Guide

Written by:

Nurses Christian Fellowship/USA | A Ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

NCF is a professional and ministry organization for nursing students, educators, and nurses, and publishes the *Journal of Christian Nursing*.

[www.ncf-jcn.org](http://www.ncf-jcn.org)

# WELCOME!

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Did you know that the average nurse interacts with more than 500 patients a year? What if these nurses saw every patient interaction as an opportunity to share the love of Jesus? What if these nurses were trained and equipped to provide meaningful spiritual care for their patients? Imagine the kind of impact that this could have on the world!

Nurses Christian Fellowship (NCF) exists to do just that, establishing witnessing communities at nursing schools across the country. Thank you for your interest and vision for reaching nursing students with the gospel. This guide will provide you with the essentials of ministry in nursing school!

*A note on nomenclature: In this guide, we will use the terms "NCF" and "nursing student ministry" interchangeably. Whether a nursing student ministry becomes a separate student organization on campus or exists under the umbrella of InterVarsity, it is still considered part of the NCF family.*

## WHAT IS NCF?

Nurses Christian Fellowship (NCF) is both a professional membership organization and a campus ministry, both of which are housed under InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Its professional membership boasts about 1,500 dues-paying members and publishes the peer-reviewed *Journal of Christian Nursing* in partnership with Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, the world's largest healthcare publisher. The campus ministry side of NCF resources about 100 student chapters in nursing schools as well as nursing small groups within general InterVarsity chapters.

# SIX GREAT REASONS TO START NCF

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## 1. A MINISTRY VACUUM EXISTS IN THIS “CORNER” OF CAMPUS

Among all the major “corners” of campus, the nursing school is one of the few that has no parallel ministry organization. In other words, *there is no other ministry that reaches out to nursing students* besides NCF. If your ambition is to go where the gospel has not been preached (Romans 15:20), nursing school is an unreached corner! (As a bonus, this means you won’t face any ministry “competition” as you plant there!)

## 2. SELF-MOTIVATED, MATURE STUDENT LEADERS

Can you imagine having student leaders who are mature, organized, responsible, and highly self-motivated? What about student leaders with classroom training and substantial experience in how to care well for others? These are the types of students you can find in nursing school—they are learning how to be professionals while in school. This means student leaders who need less hand-holding (and emotional energy!) from you.

## 3. WORLD-CHANGING GRADUATES

As InterVarsity staff, we care about seeing “world changers developed.” The typical nurse will interact with 500 patients in a year, with 500 opportunities to impact patients with the words and love of Christ! When you invest in a nursing student, you are really investing in a future world-changer!

## 4. SPIRITUAL OPENNESS

The Holy Spirit can use intense experiences to heighten people’s openness to the gospel. Nursing school is, by definition, a very intense experience. Demanding and fast-paced classroom instruction, long clinical days in challenging settings, stresses of never-ending quizzes and tests, all happening within a tight-knit student network. No wonder there is a high level of spiritual hunger among nursing students! These students are desperate for someone to help them make sense of illness, death, and suffering—you could be that answer!

## 5. CAMPUS ACCESS

Because NCF is a professional membership organization, our name can gain InterVarsity access to closed-off schools. For example, NCF has made inroads to Catholic and denominational Christian schools that may be slow to welcome InterVarsity. Planting NCF can be an easy first step to getting InterVarsity future access to the campus!

## 6. LIMITED TIME INVESTMENT—AS LITTLE AS 1 HOUR A WEEK

Who says that planting requires a lot of time? Because of the quality of student leaders and tight-knit nursing school network, planting NCF requires generally very little time. With an identified student leader and faculty advisor, many InterVarsity staff can successfully resource and plant an NCF chapter in an hour a week. Just an hour a week to plant on an unreached corner of campus that’s desperate for the gospel—how much better can it get?

# SIX TRAITS OF NURSING STUDENTS

Below is a quick summary of key traits of nursing students. For a fuller explanation of each, please see the Appendix on page 11.

TRAIT	REALITY	IMPLICATIONS
Very busy people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very little free time</li> <li>• Inflexible schedules</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit meetings (e.g. no LG attendance, no weekly 1-on-1s)</li> <li>• Determine NCF meeting time around school schedules</li> </ul>
Caring, mature, responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be slow to open up</li> <li>• Always caring for others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care well for them personally</li> <li>• Concrete acts of kindness</li> </ul>
High achieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitive environment</li> <li>• High fear of failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need encouragement</li> <li>• Need permission to fail</li> <li>• Leaders may be reluctant to take risks or come in with unrealistically high ideals and expectations of what chapter can accomplish</li> </ul>
High spiritual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences raise spiritual questions</li> <li>• Unsure of how/where to ask</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create space for spiritual questions/exploration</li> </ul>
Career-focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything is about nursing</li> <li>• Unsure how to integrate faith with vocation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer content related to faith and nursing</li> <li>• Training on spiritual care</li> </ul>
Tight social network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of time with fellow students</li> <li>• Keeping peace important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help students see network as evangelistic opportunity</li> <li>• Train on non-confrontational evangelistic strategies</li> </ul>

# WHAT ARE THE DISTINCTIVES OF *START NCF*?

Although starting NCF has many similarities to starting another ministry, there are a number of important distinctives to take note of. We have written the *Start NCF* guide as a way to contextualize a general planting strategy for ministry in nursing school.

Below is a list of major distinctives and how that may impact your coaching with students.

DISTINCTIVES	IMPACT
Detailed and step-by-step, more like a “checklist”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designed to be self-coached</li> <li>Should require less of your time since students/faculty can work through the guide independently</li> </ul>
Key checkpoints identified in the guide with encouragement to report to InterVarsity/NCF staff	Built-in checkpoints for progress. As a local staff, encourage students to report back to you at these checkpoints and engage in good <i>debrief</i> with them to continue the learning
Mission stated explicitly at beginning; we do not ask students to come up with own vision for NCF	This is designed to keep the mission central. Reinforce the mission during meetings with students. Consider leading the Step 2 prayer and planning time with them.
Emphasis on going through proper channels and obtaining permission for meetings	Since protocol is important to nursing, we encourage groups to seek official permission as they begin planting process. (If they don’t, someone will hear about it in this close-knit community). Provide logistical and administrative help as needed to help them think through how to do this well.
First few NCF meetings are explicitly laid out with detailed instructions and outlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimizes need to decide on curriculum and logistics.</li> <li>When coaching, be sure that students are following the planning checklist.</li> </ul>

# HOW TO USE *START NCF*

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Here's the suggested implementation process:

1. Read *Start NCF*. Familiarize yourself with the materials and process.
2. Find 1+ excited student and/or faculty contact. *Start NCF* says that NCF planting begins with at least one student and at least one faculty. Your job is to find one of those and help them network from there.
3. Give them *Start NCF* and walk through Step 1 and beginning of Step 2 with them. Help them say yes to the mission. Then ask them to network and invite.
4. Help your contact to plan the Prayer and Planning Meeting in Step 2. We would recommend that they take primary leadership—but you could choose to assist with the Scripture study if helpful (remember: this is NOT an inductive study!)
5. Check progress occasionally through Step 4. Coach and debrief as needed, but let them do most of the work.
6. Check in and debrief after FIRST and THIRD meetings in Step 4.
7. Do a thorough debrief with them in Step 5. You may want to lead the debrief process.

# A WALK-THROUGH OF THE GUIDE

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## OVERVIEW

### THE OVERVIEW CHECKLIST (P. 2-3)

This two-page overview is a quick reference sheet that outlines the steps to *Start NCF*. **We recommend printing this for your first meeting to “overview” the process. Keep a copy for each NCF chapter you are coaching and “check off” boxes accordingly during your check-in meetings.**

## STEP 1: SAY YES TO THE MISSION

### HOW TO FIND YOUR FIRST STUDENT

**In order to use *Start NCF*, you need at least one interested nursing student.** Here are some ideas on how to find a student:

- **Pre-nursing students.** At many campuses, students take more general, pre-nursing courses before entering nursing school. Look around your InterVarsity chapter. Are there any pre-nursing students who are planning to enter nursing school soon?
- **Contact card checkbox.** Add a checkbox on your NSO contact cards for students to indicate whether they are a nursing or pre-nursing student.
- **Student networks.** Ask chapter members whether they know any pre-nursing or nursing students. Even if those contacts are not interested, they may be able to connect you with others who are.
- **Approach nursing faculty/administrators.** Because NCF is a professional membership organization, calling yourself a representative of NCF may gain you access to faculty and administrators in nursing school. Contact NCF if you would like more details and coaching on how to do this.

### WALK THROUGH THE MISSION STATEMENT

**The goal of Step 1 is for students to say yes to the NCF mission.** While it is possible for students to develop their own vision for nursing school ministry, we have found that it is much more efficient and practical for students to embrace our national mission statement instead. This gives them the confidence that they need to invite other interested students and faculty to join them as they launch NCF.

- **Encourage, Equip, Empower.** Use those three words in the mission statement and think through together what this could look like.
- **Help the student say yes to the mission.** This does not need to be a complicated or formal process, but you want to ensure that the student agrees to the mission. If you do not know the student well, make sure that they are committed to the idea of NCF as an *empowering* community—one that brings the gospel to nursing school.

## STEP 2: FIND AND RECRUIT PARTNERS

### FORMING LAUNCH TEAM

As stated in the guide, we suggest that an NCF launch team consists of at least one student and one faculty member. If you plan to be involved in the NCF chapter, you may be able to take the place of the faculty member, though locating a Christian faculty member will still likely be very beneficial for additional access and assistance.

### PRAYER AND PLANNING MEETING

**This meeting officially launches the NCF planting process.** As staff, you will likely want to be part of its leadership. Key aspects to consider:

- **Leading Scripture study.** We would suggest you leading the Scripture study during the meeting. Keep in mind that this is a *very short* study—not an inductive one—use the questions on the worksheet to drive at the mission. As you will see in Step 4, this format of Bible studies is the recommended format for nursing student ministry.
- **Keeping mission central.** Nursing students and educators will generally be drawn first to the *encourage* and *equip* portions of the mission statement. These are essential aspects of nursing student ministry, but be sure that the group also discusses the *empower* portion as well.
- **Assessing nursing school environment.** The Scripture study ends with a time to consider how NCF can help change the nursing school culture and environment. Refer back to the 6 Traits of Nursing Students chart for an analysis of the culture. If students struggle to work through this question, here are some possible answers:
  - NCF can provide an encouraging community where students can be open about their struggles without being afraid they will be seen as a weaker performer.
  - NCF can educate nursing students on how to provide spiritual care, a topic that is generally given cursory treatment in nursing education.
  - NCF can empower nursing students to think about their spiritual questions. Nursing school stresses holistic care for patients, yet many nursing students forget to care for themselves spiritually.
- **NCF meeting logistics.** Nursing students are generally good planners, so they should excel in this part of the meeting. Many NCF chapters meet weekly or biweekly depending on the intensity of their schedules. We discourage groups from only meeting monthly. We also recommend obtaining official permission whenever possible from nursing school administrators. The nursing school community is small, and administrators and faculty often know everything that goes on in the building. Not getting their permission can be perceived as breach of protocol, which would likely make the NCF plant much more difficult. Furthermore, because nursing school buildings tend to be separate from the rest of campus, you should not expect that the administration will honor the same rules that govern an undergrad InterVarsity chapter. For example, nursing schools will likely have their own room reservation system and may have different policies about signs and posters.
- **Let NCF National know what's happening.** Reach out to [ncf@intervarsity.org](mailto:ncf@intervarsity.org) as soon as you have completed Step 2. This helps us to pray for you. Moreover, we can provide additional resources and coaching that go beyond the scope of this guide!



## STEP 3: INVITE & GET THE WORD OUT

### INVITING WORKSHEET

- **How do we invite?** Students may need help working out a 15-second answer to the question of “What is NCF?” Chances are, you know how to coach students to develop that answer—so go for it!
- **No network mapping.** We have purposefully eliminated network mapping from *Start NCF*. Why? The nursing students’ network IS the nursing school—there are few, if any, additional networks to consider. It will likely be much more helpful to brainstorm lists than network maps. Use the categories suggested to begin creating an invite list.
- **Additional recruitment ideas.** Because the nursing school network is small, a solid NSO may consist of only a table and lots of personal invitations. Students spend a lot of time in the building, so posters can be useful. Plan an event if everyone is on board, but keep the planning to a minimum—your students won’t have much time! *Remember that personal, word-of-mouth inviting is your most effective recruitment tool, though posters can be an excellent supplement as well.*
- **Getting stuck in inviting.** Remember that the nursing school network is small. That means students will likely be thinking about how inviting others can create awkwardness. Proceed as you normally would with undergrad students expressing fear of inviting. Cast good vision and show them how to do it in a respectful and winsome manner.
- **See NCF website for more resources.** Look at the [ncf-jcn.org](http://ncf-jcn.org) website for additional resources such as display board and flyer templates.

## STEP 4: LAUNCH THE NCF GROUP

### PREPARING FOR THE FIRST MEETING

- **Details and checklists.** Depending on your chapter’s culture, you may find daunting the level of detail in the first meeting guide. Most nursing students are very good at executing step-by-step procedures—the first meeting guide is written for them. Encourage students to use the checklists as checklists. Print them out and put them in a clipboard or binder so they can make sure everything has been completed.
- **Lead study prep.** Consider leading the first Bible study prep time. Remember that deep, inductive study is not the goal. Let the students work out the answers using the questions on the worksheet.
- **Teach the Discipleship Cycle.** Nursing students regularly learn and apply frameworks in nursing, so teach them the Discipleship Cycle as a framework for leading NCF (see Scanning the First Bible Study section for sample wording).
- **Assign roles.** As part of the planning process, make sure that roles have been assigned for the first meeting. Think carefully about who can lead the first study with poise and conviction.

### AT FIRST MEETING

- **Be present and help with hospitality pieces.** Your presence will be one of the most important things you can contribute to the NCF launch. Offer to bring snacks/lunch if the meeting is during a meal time.
- **Watch how the group is engaging.** During the meeting, look around and pay attention to how the NCF group is doing. This will give you valuable observations to debrief later.
- **Remember to ENCOURAGE!** Your student leaders may have never led a Bible study before. By stepping up and leading a discussion, they are risking failure—a big deal for them. So encourage them whenever possible throughout the meeting!

## AFTER FIRST MEETING

- **Debrief with the launch team.** Ask good open-ended questions such as “How did you see God at work?” and “What surprised you?” Nursing students naturally lean towards critique instead of praise. Be sure to help them celebrate their first meeting (a momentous occasion!) and steer them away from severe critique.
- **Plan second meeting.** Repeat the process as with the first meeting, but consider prepping the second study one-on-one with the leader. No need to get overly involved in the details planning of the meeting—the students should be able to do that by themselves.
- **Meeting reminders.** Help students remember to text/e-mail/Facebook classmates before the next meeting. Though nursing students are excellent planners, they also have so many other things going on in life that they may forget about NCF meetings. Reminders can be very helpful.

## SECOND THROUGH FOURTH MEETINGS

- **Repeat the process as before.** We recommend debriefing after the FIRST and THIRD meetings—no need to debrief every meeting.

## STEP 5: EVALUATING THE LAUNCH

### AFTER FOURTH MEETING

- **Debrief and Evaluate.** Use the Evaluate the Launch questions to assess and learn together.
- **Decide on next curriculum.** We would strongly recommend using more of the pre-prepped NCF studies found at [ncf-jcn.org/resources/bible-study-materials](http://ncf-jcn.org/resources/bible-study-materials). You may want to consider the remainder of the Trusting God in Nursing School series or perhaps the Healing Encounter with Jesus series.
- **Student Org Status? Affiliation?** Talk with your supervisor about whether to affiliate the NCF group separately and/or whether to seek separate student organization recognition on campus. Feel free to e-mail [ncf@intervarsity.org](mailto:ncf@intervarsity.org) to discuss this further.

## THINKING EVANGELISTICALLY

The NCF Bible studies make the *encourage* and *equip* portions of the mission easy to accomplish. The *empower* portion will take more work.

- Provide evangelism training. You may want to start with the leaders...or ask whether you can provide some training in place of a normal NCF meeting. Consider a training about asking good spiritual questions (use the language “spiritual assessment”) or sharing the gospel (using the Jesus the Great Healer gospel presentation in the *Start NCF* guide).
- Present the gospel at a meeting. Consider using the language “spiritual self-assessment” to describe this form of NCF meeting. Present the Jesus the Great Healer gospel presentation, invite people to self-assess, then share in small groups (with a response card).
- Plan a special outreach event. The easiest form of outreach event is to bring in an outside speaker. Locate a Christian nurse (or faculty member) who would be willing to share on a topic related to nursing and faith. As part of the presentation, they can share about their faith journey, and you could finish with an invitation to seek after Jesus (with a response card, of course).

# APPENDIX 1: SIX TRAITS OF NURSING STUDENTS

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Review this expanded format on the reality and needs of nursing students to understand their ministry context.

## 1. NURSING STUDENTS ARE VERY BUSY PEOPLE

### REALITY

Their academic schedule is quite intense and involves a combination of all-day classes and clinical experiences. They spend much of their “free time” studying classroom material and preparing for clinicals. Some will have jobs and/or volunteer commitments on the side. And non-traditional students (which are common) may have family obligations as well.

### NEED

Nursing students need grace and flexibility. They may need to cancel meetings unexpectedly, and you may feel like you need to work around their rather packed schedules. Nursing students tend to be planners—try to plan ahead in setting up times to meet. Recognize their time limitations—they will not likely be able to attend a weekly large group meeting or even a weekly leaders’ meeting. They probably should not schedule a weekly, lengthy one-on-one discipleship time. Think one structure a week (e.g. NCF meeting) and a check-in once every 2-4 weeks. Consider meeting in the school of nursing or at the hospital, during a gap between classes or a lunch break. Pre-written, 30 to 45-minute contextualized bible studies are available to minimize student leaders’ preparation time.

## 2. NURSING STUDENTS ARE GENERALLY CARING, MATURE AND RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE

### REALITY

Nursing school prepares students for a professional career; hence, schools expect a high level of maturity and responsibility when admitting students. Moreover, nursing students participate in clinical experiences in which they are entrusted with responsibility for patients’ well-being. Thus, they tend to be people who follow through on their commitments and (at least externally) act like responsible leaders. Finally, people who pursue nursing often have an instinctive urge to protect and take care of others around them.

### NEED

Despite external appearances, nursing students may struggle with emotional development. Though they look like they are put together, but like many of us, they too carry deep-seated emotional pain. In addition, because of the intensity of their education, their spiritual development is often neglected or put “on hold.” They need a Christian community or mentor who will prioritize their emotional and spiritual development. And they need places where they can “let their guard down,” where someone else can care for them...instead of their caring for others. Simple acts of kindness and service can be very meaningful: offering to pray for them or serving a healthy lunch or snack.

### 3. NURSING STUDENTS ARE HIGH ACHIEVING PEOPLE

#### REALITY

Admittance into nursing school often requires strong grades and volunteering experiences. Once they are in the program, they are expected to maintain those same academic standards. As a result, nursing schools (inadvertently) foster a competitive and stressful academic environment. Furthermore, because they are high-achieving, many nursing students do not really know how to handle failure. Failure, in fact, marks one of the most dominant fears in nursing school.

#### NEED

Almost all nursing students at some point in their academic journey will wonder whether they can “make it” through nursing school. They need encouragement (and perspective) from mentors and a community to keep going. They also need to know that God loves them unconditionally, irrespective of their academic successes and failures. Finally, they need someone to give them room to fail. Consider how to set up leadership expectations such that there is grace to fail and assure with words and action that faithfulness, not fruitfulness, is what God looks for.

### 4. NURSING STUDENTS HAVE HIGH SPIRITUAL NEEDS

#### REALITY

As nursing students encounter trauma, suffering, and death, they subconsciously try to make sense of life. In addition, the never-ending stresses of nursing school elicits an openness to spiritual exploration and support. Thus, nursing students, whether they admit it or not, have a high need for answers to their spiritual questions.

#### NEED

Nursing students need someone to create space and grant permission to ask spiritual questions. They are often uncertain whether spiritual questions are “professional” enough to be explored in nursing school. They are concerned that such questions may make their classmates uncomfortable, which could alienate them from the close-knit nursing school community. Providing space (such as a Bible study or a GIG) for such questions is one of the best gifts you can offer. Finding appropriate ways to raise spiritual questions in more public spaces would be a gift to the whole nursing school—whether hosting a special speaker or offering free prayer for the campus.

### 5. NURSING STUDENTS ARE CAREER-FOCUSED

#### REALITY

Nursing students go to nursing school because they want to be nurses. Therefore, they are very focused on their careers. Especially when clinicals begin, nursing consumes their whole life. A typical nursing student will consider event invitations through the lens of whether the opportunity will help them advance in their career.

#### NEED

Nursing students need to know how to integrate faith with vocation. A general Bible study will have limited appeal to them; a Bible study focused on faith and nursing may be much more popular. Nursing students are taught to care for patients holistically, but few receive adequate training on how to provide spiritual care for their patients. Offering seminars on spiritual care and Bible studies on gossip in the workplace are excellent ways to raise students’ curiosity through the lens of professional development.

## 6. NURSING STUDENTS ARE PART OF A TIGHT-KNIT NURSING SCHOOL NETWORK

### REALITY

Nursing students take classes, participate in clinicals, and engage in simulations with the same group of classmates. Thus, because of proximity, time together, and common interests, nursing students get to know each other fairly well. As a result, the nursing school student body is a well-networked community where many students will know each other by name. On the flip side, this means that nursing students rarely spend time with non-nursing students—their relational networks become more concentrated in the nursing school.

### NEED

Christian nursing students need to be able to see their networks as missional opportunities. They may be reluctant to “disturb the peace” by bringing up spiritual matters, but these networks are also the greatest opportunities for talking about Jesus. Students will need training on how to approach spiritual conversations in a loving and non-confrontational manner.