

The Health Cabinet **Rev. Dr. Granger Westberg**

What is a Health Cabinet?

Rev. Dr. Granger Westberg used to say that just as every household has a medicine cabinet, every church needs a health cabinet. He went on to say: “If a poll-taker were to ask people in a community to identify the health agencies around them,” he said, “they would probably never think to mention parish churches. Yet I’m convinced that a large percentage of Americans are kept well by their relationship to their community of faith.” (Granger Westberg Verbatim: A Vision for Faith and Health, Peterson, Wm. Editor, p. 57)

“... Caring for one another is a natural dynamic in most churches, synagogues, and other centers of faith. Health cabinets (often called health and wellness committees) were designed for the express purpose of helping congregations enhance their ministries of health. A congregation interested in adding a parish nurse to its staff is encouraged to form a health cabinet early in the planning process.” (The Parish Nurse, Westberg, Granger E., Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990, p. 37)

“The health cabinet is made up of volunteers who are concerned about health and who are committed to seeing that the healing ministry of the church is carried out. The health cabinet assists individuals and families in becoming more responsible for maintaining and improving their own health and that of their community. The health cabinet is not involved in diagnosis and treatment; that is the domain of the family physician. However, it seeks to be a strong influence on the congregation to the end that stewardship of health is expressed in all areas of church life, including worship, education, support networks and recreation.

The health cabinet works in three main areas:

1. Sponsoring health-related activities through already existing structures and gatherings such as worship service, Sunday school classes, and youth groups...
2. Sponsoring new programs or activities...
3. Looking at the overall health and “unhealth” in the life of the whole congregation...

The Parish Nurse and the Health Cabinet

The health cabinet is the church committee that interviews candidates for the position of parish nurse. Once the nurse is chosen, she becomes a member of the health cabinet. The health cabinet’s primary role in relating to the nurse is to provide support. Without such support, the most devoted and talented nurse is likely to experience burnout, followed by guilt for not fulfilling her own expectations. The cabinet members need to support the nurse emotionally, help her decide what needs to be done, assist her with projects, and take on responsibilities delegated to them by the nurse for the healing ministry. . . .” (The Parish Nurse, Westberg, Granger E., Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990, p. 40-44)