

Reasons to form a local Council of Catholic Nurses

We are all privileged to have been called to the vocation of being Catholic nurses. The very fact of our employment gives us the opportunity to perform the corporal works of mercy every day – to visit the sick, feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. As Catholic nurses we also have the opportunity to comfort the sorrowful, counsel the doubtful and instruct the uninformed. We are the hands of Jesus! This is our chance to “Be merciful even as your Father is merciful” (Lk.6:36)

Each of us is supported in our vocation by our Faith and by our daily prayer life. However it is a great help to us if we have friends and co-workers who share our philosophy of nursing. They will give us support and encouragement when this task is difficult. This is why it is a great blessing to belong to a Council of Catholic nurses. Here you are joined with Catholic nurses who share the same Faith, philosophy and professional attitudes. At the same time you are enhancing your own spiritual, professional and personal life.

Both the late Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII asked Catholic nurses to organize. The response to this request was the formation of CICIAMS (the International Organization of Catholic Nurses) and the formation of National Councils in 46 countries. At this time I believe that Associations from 60 countries are members of CICIAMS. In the United States a National Association and numerous local Councils were formed.

In the USA the association was formally organized in June 1940, not by the Catholic Nurses but by the Administrative Board of the Bishops of the United States, at the request of the late Pope Pius XI.

The Holy Father, in a letter, asked that there be local associations of Catholic Nurses where feasible, according to the needs of the respective dioceses, under the guidance of the Bishop, and in due time be united to create the National Council. The late Pope Pius XII reiterated this request of his predecessor by saying, “The Catholic Nurse must carry on her professional activity in the light of the Church’s doctrines and Christian morality.”

The Council was given two directives: to have a better understanding of the teachings of the Church, and to practice Christian principles in daily living.

A Council of Catholic nurses in no way replaces membership in professional organizations but should inspire its members to be active leaders in professional groups.

NACN-USA functions with the permission, blessing and supervision of a Bishop. We also need a spiritual advisor approved by the Bishop. Our Bishop at this time is Bishop Joseph Siegle, Auxillary Bishop of the Diocese of Joliet, IL. This same structure is required of local councils. The local Bishop must approve the formation of your Council. The Bishop may endorse more than one Council (Boston MA had 4 councils at one time). However, each Council (local chapter) must have its own Priest as spiritual advisor.

Each of you here present will find comfort, satisfaction, friendship and happiness in belonging to a Council of Catholic nurses. Now, as Mary Pellizzari explains just how to form a Council, please keep in mind that this task is easier if you have a core of members that you see often and can speak with easily.

May God bless you and the Holy Spirit inspire you as you go forward to do His work.

How to Start a Diocesan Council of Catholic Nurses

5 Documents included in this file:

1. Reasons to form a local Council of Catholic Nurses by Kathy Kirkpatrick, BSN, RN
2. How to start a diocesan Council of Catholic Nurses by Mary Pellizzari, RN and Eula Sforza, RN
3. Brief history of the founding of San Francisco Archdiocese Council and Oakland Diocese Council by Mary Ann Haeuser, MS, RN, FNP
4. Bylaws of Council of Catholic Nurses of Joliet, IL Diocese
5. Bylaws of National Association of Catholic Nurses, Archdiocese of San Francisco, CA

HOW TO START A DIOCESAN COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC NURSES

By Mary Pellizzari, RN and Eula Sforza, RN (Revised 2/27/13)

Here are some suggestions for starting a council based on our experience of starting the Council of Catholic Nurses of the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois. Always remember that God is your C.E.O. The Holy Spirit will be guiding you. We have always prayed before every meeting and before doing any work for the council. Prayer has given us strength, guidance, and the assurance that God really wanted us to start a council and be there for our nursing peers. Nurses are always supporting others, and this is a way to support nurses.

First, know the boundaries and the circumstances of your diocese. The Joliet Diocese has seven counties with a larger population of nurses in the northern counties closer to Chicago employment. We focused on this area to reach a greater number of nurses and because we lived there. Contact your bishop through your diocesan chancery office. Eula and Claire Lareau, who were Chicago Archdiocesan Council members, met with our Joliet Bishop Joseph Imesch to explain the purpose and function of diocesan councils and to express an interest in starting one in the Joliet Diocese. He told them he would give his permission if we could find at least 43 nurses who were interested.

Next, plan and conduct an interest meeting, inviting friends, co-workers, and other interested nurses. This meeting can be held at a parish or a hospital. We started at St. Joan of Arc Parish where Mary was a parishioner. Parochial Vicar Fr. Kenneth Zigmond, O.S.B. welcomed the group and led them in an opening prayer. The purpose of an interest meeting is to acquaint Catholic nurses with the concept of a diocesan council and the importance and benefits of having a council. We wanted to provide nurses with spiritual support and information about the difficult medical and legal ethics that many are encountering in our profession today. After introductions and dialogue distribute a questionnaire to gather their names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and input regarding their needs, wants, issues, concerns, ideas, and if they are willing to help. Provide extra questionnaire copies with a return address for them to give to friends not present. If there is interest and hopefully enthusiasm, seek volunteers to be acting officers (President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer) for two years to give the council stability during formation. Let the nurses have an opportunity to donate seed money for initial costs and postage.

The next step is to let the bishop know how the interest meeting went and how many nurses are interested. Ask his permission to form a diocesan council and to appoint a spiritual director who might be a hospital chaplain or have a medical or legal background. Our bishop gave his approval and appointed Fr. Eugene Parnisari who was also an attorney. Bishop Imesch restricted us to only one mass per year as a group. The rest was up to us.

This will be a busy time for your group. Keep everyone informed and involved. During your formation meetings led by your acting officers you will need to name your council, choose a patron saint, a motto, and a logo. The logo should be used on your correspondence and application/ information forms which

makes people aware of your identity. You will need to write your bylaws, establish dues, get your EIN (employer identification number) from the IRS, get a post office box or stable address, open a bank account, and plan your first program. The vice-president can be in charge of programs. An office can be set up in one of the officer's homes to keep the membership data base, correspondence, and other information in a central place.

The first program can be spiritual or educational. Our first program was on burnout and was presented by a psychologist at our President Marlene Rasmussen's hospital. Tap your resources. God will send you the help and the talent needed. Along with word of mouth, you will need to advertise your existence in your diocesan newspaper, parish bulletins, hospitals, nursing homes, etc. A membership application is a must to recruit new members and to let nurses know you exist. Make use of e-mail, a website, Facebook, and other electronic means. You might even publish a simple newsletter explaining your council and upcoming programs to be sent to nurses responding to your publicity.

We incorporated our council with the state of Illinois for annual fiscal accountability, but this is not necessary. We suggest you keep your bylaws as simple as possible. Be sure to include the duties of each officer, voting and amendment procedures. Contact NACN-USA for copies of other councils' bylaws. Your dues include membership in the council, NACN-USA, and CICIAMS (the international organization). Keep NACN-USA posted on your progress and if you need help. Send your bishop's approval letter, names of officers, contact information, your bylaws, and upcoming events to NACN-USA.

The frequency and types of meetings you have are your decision. We recommend a balance of spiritual, educational (hopefully with CEU's), and social. A newsletter is essential with at least two or more a year. Sending most newsletters by e-mail will save a lot of postage. After you are more established, the monthly Ethics and Medics newsletter published by The National Catholic Bioethics Center could be sent to your members. You have many decisions to make, but all of your efforts will be worthwhile. You are in our prayers. If you have questions: contact Mary Pellizzari, 1414 Old Farm Road, Unit B, Champaign, IL 61821, phone (217)607-1727 or e-mail marypellizzari@comcast.net. or Kathy Kirkpatrick, 19 Locust St., Woburn, MA 01801, phone (508)776-5556 or e-mail kathykirkpatrickrn@comcast.net.

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A brief history of the founding of the San Francisco Archdiocese Council of the National Catholic Nurses Association and approval for the Oakland Diocese Council.

Unfortunately some of the timing of the history of the founding of the local Council is vague as I did not keep notes along the way.

After I accepted Kathleen Kirkpatrick's invitation to become the NW representative for the National Association of Catholic Nurses-USA (NACN-USA) and was inspired by her leadership and the dedication of Mary Pellizzarri, I embarked on the project of establishing a local council for NACN-USA in the San Francisco Archdiocese where I reside. I believed at that time, and still do, that Catholic nurses need an association of their own to provide spiritual nurturance, education on ethical issues from a Catholic perspective, and mutual support in our various practices.

San Francisco Archdiocese encompasses three counties: Marin in the north, San Francisco in the middle, and San Mateo in the south. It is but one part of what is known as the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2009, its archbishop was His Grace, George Niederauer. Early in 2009, I approached the pro-life coordinator at the Archdiocese for guidance in contacting the Archbishop and his possible response to this proposal. She provided me with a suggested route to take which turned out not to work, meaning that I got no response at all from the Chancery Office. I then turned to the Archdiocesan Coordinator for Social Justice who was able to personally guide my letter of request to the Archbishop. Although I had requested a face-to-face meeting, I never was granted one, but on August 20, 2009, I received a letter from Archbishop Niederauer granting me permission to establish a council.

I had been working with some nurses from the California Catholic Women's Forum (CCWF) who were very interested in the NACN and the local council. We planned three "meet and greets" for November and December of 2009. I was able to send out a notice for bulletins in all of the parishes via the archdiocesan pro-life coordinator, local Catholic nursing schools were contacted (Dominican University of California and University of San Francisco), and nurses friends were invited by word of mouth. The three meetings were spread though the three counties. We were pleased with the results, having about 15-20 participants.

As a follow up to that meeting a "Survey monkey" was sent out to ascertain preferred meeting times/days, places, types of events, and other interests. About 1/3 of the participants responded. Providing CEUs was a big draw and we were able to do that through the CCWF. In April 2010, we had a meeting on Catholic Healthcare Professionals at the Intersection of Public Policy presented by Carol Hogan of the California Council of Catholic Bishops. We had an attendance of about 12-15 people and it was well received. We also managed to be interviewed on Immaculate Heart Radio.

Although several people told me that they had heard the interview, it did not generate any interest in membership. In September of 2010, we had a table at the annual Archdiocesan Pro-life Conference. The topic was on End-of-Life care. All nurses who attended the conference were contacted and invited to join the organization.

In January 2011, an attempt was made to have a contingent of Catholic Nurses participate in the West coast Walk for Life. Although several of us attended, we were not able to coalesce as a group. We were defeated by the weather (pouring rain) and poor logistics. To my recollection, we were not able to set up another meeting during 2011 until the Annual Pro-Life Conference in September 2011 which we co-hosted with the Archdiocese. Again, CEU's were provided through the CCWF. We were privileged to have members of the National Catholic Bio-ethics Center for that conference, including Dr. Marie Hilliard. She graciously agreed to host a "meet and greet" for all the nurses and we had a small meeting at that time.

In the meantime, work had been going forward on developing by-laws for the local council. I was helped by seeing by-laws from other councils and from the national organization which was in the midst of revising its own by-laws. They were complete by late fall 2011 and sent out to members electronically for review. No response was received. We had a Mass celebrated by our spiritual director and a meeting in early January 2012 attended by 5 members who worked diligently at refining the by-laws. In January 2012, we were invited to participate on the stage at the West Coast Walk for Life as part of a healthcare presence. We had about ½ dozen participants. Unfortunately we didn't manage to walk as a group. I was, however, interviewed by ETWN's "On this Rock".

In March 2012 we sponsored CEUs for nurses at the "An Integrated and Unified Solution for Catholic Healthcare Reform" Conference sponsored by the Archdiocese of San Francisco. It was a wonderful conference with participants from all over the country. CEUs were provided by Dominican University of California as the CCWF had put their renewal of provider status on hold. We attempted to follow up on the enthusiasm from that meeting with a business meeting in April to ratify the by-laws. The meeting was held at the University San Francisco (thanks to a student member). We had Dr. Thomas Cavanaugh speaking on conscience rights. We had 4 participants at that meeting ☺ Since then we have had no further meetings.

In the meantime, I have managed to secure permission from the Bishop of the Oakland Diocese to start a council in that Diocese. That again was a long and circuitous process. It was only feasible because I have an acquaintance who works in the Office of Marriage and Family Life. Finally in late July 2012, on the day he was named Archbishop of San Francisco, Bishop Salvatore Cordileone granted his permission for a local council to be formed. Unlike Archbishop Niederauer of SF, Bishop Cordileone reviewed the history and website of the NACN-USA, its by-laws and the local by-laws for the SF Chapter. Following up on that, I had a meeting late in August 2012, with one of our members from the diocese regarding beginning a chapter there. Since then there have been no new developments.