

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE NURSING: Foundation for a Community of Care

Talk for Beacon Haven Annual Meeting
given by Kim C Korinek, Christian Science

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After a recognition of the audience's participation in providing a community of care since 1922, the talk began.

This talk is part of a trilogy of talks on Christian Science Nursing I have given to Nursing Organizations in the Midwest. Each one carries the same message from a different angle with similar and different points, all in an effort to help raise the profile of Christian Science nursing in our movement and the world. So thank you for giving me the opportunity to give this talk here: Christian Science Nursing: the Foundation for our Community of Care.

How do Christian Scientists care for each other?

Recently, Bethel College students approached the New Brighton church about a project they were doing on how communities care for each other. They decided to look into a Christian Science congregation. They asked questions like: what kind of support did we offer to one another? How did the congregation relate to the larger community? And similar questions were asked on the theme of "How do Christian Scientists care for each other?"

They aren't the only ones asking that question.

Family members and friends of those receiving care are asking this question – How do Christian Scientists care for one another? How is my loved one/friend being taken care of? Can they take medicine AND Christian Science?

Legislators are asking this same question. In Wisconsin, where I am from, they are asking if Christian Science is effective. Should legislation accommodate effective healing prayer? In Minnesota and nationwide, they are asking how do Christian Scientists care for one another? How much does it cost? Why should Christian Science care be included in Health Care Reform?

I attended a meeting last year where doctors, hospital staff and ethicists asked the question -- How do Christian Scientists care for one another? How do you deal with life threatening conditions? Are people shamed, shunned or ostracized if they go to a doctor?

Now we know that shunning is never a part of Christian Science, but the public has posed questions about Christian Science and have questioned its effectiveness – getting it mixed up with faith healing and Scientology.

With health care reform issues taking over headlines and with the growing claim that western medicine is the only way to experience true healing, it is time that we all be able to fully answer that question: How do we care for one another?

Christian Science Nursing – Foundation for our Christian caring

If we could choose one by-law from our church Manual to illustrate how we care, it would be the Christian Science nurse by-law, and this provides the foundation for our community of care.

In *The Foundation for Christian Science Nursing* statement from The Christian Science Board of Directors in the 80's, it explains: “The Christian Science nurse is an outward symbol of the Christianity of our Church – our Christian caring” and “The Christian Science nurse is visible evidence of the willingness and capability of Christian Scientists to extend aid, assistance and loving care”¹

In order to answer the question – how do Christian Science care for one another, we'll answer within the framework of the Christian Science nurse and look at two topics:

1. what kind of community of care exists? and
2. what impact does the model of the Christian Science nurse have on healing – ourselves, our churches and our larger communities?

How do Christian Science care for one another - a community of care

The easy answer to the above question is that we have Christian Science practitioners, Christian Science nurses – who work doing private duty nursing, home nursing and nursing in facilities - as well as church care committees, and Committees on Publication who keep us informed on many issues. But there is so much more behind this community.

Community is an age-old idea – even an eternal idea. Some say community is about grace; others say it should be based on people's love and concern for one another.²

Let's take a look at the early Christian communities where community obligation and mutual responsibility went hand in hand. Elaine Follis writes in a *Christian Science Sentinel* article about these early Christian communities: “The orphan and widow received special assistance from neighbors, not so much as an act of charity as an act of community obligation—in other words, because it evidenced how people who live in fellowship with God and with each other ought to behave.”³

Christianity grew from exclusively Jewish origins, then rapidly expanded to international communities of many different ethnic groups, languages, and coming from monotheistic and

¹ The Foundation for Christian Science Nursing, The Christian Science Board of Directors; copyright 1987

² Ideas from Matthew Fox, Episcopalian priest and theologian; and Millard Fuller, founder and former president of Habitat for Humanity, International

³ “The way of Love pays all our debts” Elaine Follis from the August 14, 2006, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*.

polytheistic traditions.⁴ Think of the diversity of these early communities! No wonder Paul and John addressed their letters to the growing churches urging love for one another and unity!⁵

So, community is about grace, loving each other, mutual responsibility and diversity in unity – a common unity.

Early Christian communities then became churches focused on Christ's healing message which is best articulated in Christ Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Dummelow, editor of the popular One Volume Bible Commentary, comments that the Sermon "is a more or less full revelation of Christ's own character, a kind of autobiography."⁶ Mary Baker Eddy writes that the Sermon is the "essence of this (Christian) science."⁷ The Sermon instructs us how to be Christlike in community and also gives us the Lord's Prayer - the inspiration of "which instantaneously heals the sick"⁸ as Mary Baker Eddy says.

Mrs. Eddy's establishment of the mission of church forges together a community where primitive Christianity and healing are interrelated. So much so, that she recommends that "each member of this Church shall strive to demonstrate by his or her practice, that Christian Science heals the sick quickly and wholly, thus proving this Science to be all that we claim for it."⁹

This commitment and expectation that each member of this Church demonstrates that Christian Science heals the sick quickly and wholly is particularly interesting when we look at what it means to care for the sick in the context of a church of healers.

Caring for the sick in the context of a church of healers

Mary Baker Eddy provides this approach with three main ideas:

1st point: EARLY CALL for help if needed

Mary Baker Eddy writes "If students do not readily heal themselves, they should early call an experienced Christian Scientist to aid them. If they are unwilling to do this for themselves, they need only to know that error cannot produce this unnatural reluctance."¹⁰

2nd point: ASSIST Assistance in brotherhood

You are all familiar with this passage "The rich in spirit help the poor in one grand brotherhood, all having the same Principle, or Father; and blessed is that man who seeth his brother's need and supplieth it, seeking his own in another's good."¹¹

But did you know that Mary Baker Eddy mentions "brotherhood/family/fellowship" over 190 times in her writings? She talks about care of others in her *Message to The Mother Church 1901*

⁴ The New Testament – Fifth Edition by Stephen L. Harris, California State University p. 315

⁵ Examples: See Phil 2: 2, 1 Cor 1: 10 and 1 John chapters 2 and 4

⁶ The One Volume Bible Commentary, edited by Rev. JR Dummelow, p. 637

⁷ *Science and Health* p. 271

⁸ *Science and Health* p. 16

⁹ Manual p. 92 Art. XXX sect. 7

¹⁰ *Science and Health* p. 420

¹¹ *Science and Health* p.518: 15

and pays particular attention to the care of those “in the advancing stages of their careers” as well as the “aged reformer” who may need “the watchful and tender care of those who want to help them”.¹²

From a letter written to Mary Beecher Longyear in January of 1906, she wrote:

“Our cause demands a wider circle of means for the ends of philanthropy and charity and better qualifications for practical purposes. This latter lack of Students in Christian Science is a great hindrance to our Cause and must be met and mastered.”¹³

This can give us some insight as to why, two years later, in 1908, she included the Christian Science Nurse by-law in the chapter on Discipline and under the article of Guidance of Members making the Christian Science Nurse By-law relevant to every member.

3rd point: FOUNDATION for CARE - The Christian Science Nurse By-Law

We can conclude then that the Christian Science nurse has something to do with the discipline and guidance of every member in how we care for ourselves and one another in a way that leads to healing.

In short, Mary Baker Eddy has created a church that actively pursues healing in community.

Caring for the sick can be summarized in four points:

1. Do you need help? – Get it.
2. Can you help others? – Give it.
3. Our care for one another is all done within the standard set by the Christian Science nurse
4. And this is what leads to quick and effective healing.

Nursing is an integral part of healing and of church

Mary Baker Eddy’s definition of nurse gives us the foundation for our community of care.

Nursing is not an isolated activity only reserved for an elite few, but is an integral part of church and of healing.

We find Mary Baker Eddy’s words about a nurse in *Science and Health* “The nurse should be cheerful, orderly, punctual, patient, full of faith, — receptive to Truth and Love”¹⁴ are woven into all her writings! In fact, she mentions those words and their roots almost 700 times throughout her writings! These are also characteristics of a good Christian.

Looking at the by-law itself, we get the framework for care – and remember that each aspect of the by-law has something to do with the guidance and discipline of how we care for ourselves and others – the getting and giving of care. A friend even commented that it is a good guideline for caring for our churches, our movement, even our environment!

¹² Message to The Mother Church 1901 by Mary Baker Eddy p. 28

¹³ Letter to Mary Beecher Longyear from Mary Baker Eddy, January 15, 1905 L05380 The Mary Baker Eddy Library

¹⁴ *Science and Health* by Mary Baker Eddy, p. 395

The three main components of the Christian Science nurse by-law¹⁵ are simple and direct:

- ❑ demonstrable knowledge of Christian Science practice; this includes knowing how to defend thought ; not being impressed by physical sense testimony.
- ❑ practical wisdom - this includes discernment, good judgment, spiritual intuition, and “involves intuition, hope, faith, understanding, fruition, reality.”¹⁶
- ❑ takes proper care of the sick – this includes understanding the need for normal activity, eating, cleanliness, clothing and shelter

Here are some wonderful examples of people providing that type of care that breaks through fear and ushers in healing:

A friend wrote me about a time when he was in a Christian Science nursing facility. He wrote: *“The morning nurse came in to help me wash. I commented that I’d had a rough night, and just so casually as she helped me wash, and with a chuckle in her voice, she added, “Oh, that silly dream” and it immediately eliminated the problem I had had that night.....it was just a dream!”*

A colleague wrote of a time a friend who was a Christian Science nurse paused in her journey to spend a night with her: *“.....”(When my friend arrived) I helped her with her bag, showed her the towels I had left out for her, and then I excused myself and literally collapsed into my bed. My condition had devolved to the point of pain so great that it was making me nauseous....I went to raise myself on my arms to hurry to the bathroom, when there at my side...was Nancy...with wastebasket, warm washcloth for cleaning me up, cool washcloth for my forehead afterwards, and cold glass of juice at the ready. I so was stunned by her intuitiveness...her preparedness and her kindness, that within moments I was well, and my respect for nurses was forged....instantly.*

These are wonderful examples of how Christian Scientists care for one another! This is a community of care where people are not afraid to give care, not ashamed to receive care. And we find that following the standard of the Christian Science nurse leads to healing.

This is a “roll up your sleeves” type of Christianity; it is boldness and meekness combined; it is “the tender word and Christian encouragement”; it is “pitiful patience with another’s fears and the removal of them”, it is “legitimate Christian Science, aflame with divine Love”.¹⁷

Christian Science nursing’s impact on individuals as givers and receivers of care

We talked about how Christian Science nursing has something to do with the discipline and guidance of every member.

Mary Baker Eddy takes this further in a passage explaining the role of each rule and by-law in the Manual. She writes in *The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany*¹⁸ that each by-law (this includes nursing) applies to each of us equally. Each by-law, including Christian Science

¹⁵ Manual p. 49 Article VIII section 31

¹⁶ SH 298: 13

¹⁷ Science and Health p. 366

¹⁸ The First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany, p. 230

nursing, helps us to comfort others! Each by-law, including Christian Science nursing, “increases our spirituality”; “it awakens the sinner”; and each by-law, including Christian Science nursing, is all about quick and complete healing because it “invigorates our capacity to heal the sick.”

As I mentioned before, nursing is not an isolated activity of church. Nor is nursing only for a certain age group, nor does it only happen in a facility. It is for anyone at any time at any place.

I could be a poster child for the benefits of Christian Science nursing! I believe that between my family and me, we have experienced Christian Science nursing under the widest variety of situations and covering every stage of life!

- ❑ When starting off in college, I took a part-time job as a Christian Science nurse’s aide and learned the basics of how to create a healing atmosphere, how to spiritualize every single caring activity and how to support healing under every condition. This laid down a foundation for how I cared for myself, my home and others, and later, for my Christian Science practice.
- ❑ When we were starting our family, I called a nurse to ask questions about care for myself during pregnancy and she helped with practical and inspired ideas over the phone.
- ❑ We asked a Christian Science nurse to be present with us at the hospital during the birth of one of our sons. When things were getting overwhelming and frustrating for me, the nurse’s calm presence helped let harmony prevail and the birth went forward naturally.
- ❑ When raising our two sons, we relied on the experience of a Christian Science nurse who wrote a book which shared practical ideas like schedules, food, and activities along with clear metaphysical ideas on the role of parents. This gave me the confidence that I would know what to do with my babies from the very first day they arrived – AND for all the days that followed.
- ❑ After we moved our young family across the country, my husband injured his back, totally incapacitating him. We called a nursing facility for admission. The tangible presence of Love and the prompt unworried attention to his needs led to a complete recovery in three days.
- ❑ A couple of times, when I needed a little break from routine and needed some focused study, I came and stayed at a nursing facility as a Rest and Study guest. It became a home away from home and when I left, I was rejuvenated.
- ❑ Some time ago, I called on a Christian Science nurse for helpful ideas about preparing food for my mom when we were caring for her at home. Her take on food preparation was fresh, fun and inspiring. Preparing a meal became an act of love.
- ❑ Another nurse was present when my mother passed on, affirming, just as did the Christian Science nurse who attended my son’s birth, the wonder of eternal life.

In each situation and at every stage of life the Christian Science nursing approach to care helped guide and discipline my thought toward healing in Christian Science and I gained a greater sense of God’s infinite readiness, tenderness and love.

Receiving care in Christian Science: where meekness = might
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To further understand the impact of Christian Science nursing of the individual, let’s talk about the receiving end. In Christian Science treatment, the patient is in charge of the healing. So, taking the initiative and calling on a practitioner and a nurse is a progressive step where you recognize

your authority to take action and affirm your own dignity. By taking this step, you are loving to yourself and to others. You give others the assurance that care is being given and you give yourself the highest form of human care.

You realize that you are not an isolated mortal struggling alone, but you are part of a great company of good people who have overcome crises and are working, like you, to reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing.

Your stand for healing removes any reluctance or even aggressive obstacles to healing. This is important, because if the reluctance is not handled or these obstacles are not removed, this would lead to neglect and this would undermine the dignity and defense not only of the individual, but of our Cause.

Removing obstacles and reluctance to properly caring for yourself

So what are these obstacles?

Maybe these obstacles have to do with worth and value. Sometimes there may be the feeling that a person isn't worth the trouble it may cause others to give him or her care. And perhaps there is the fear that the care will cause serious financial problems. In fact, the financial issue may be as prominent an issue for Christian Scientists as it is for our larger communities. There could be the perception that medical care is more affordable than Christian Science care. This is where a loving and compassionate community can support and actually be a quickening agent for healing and assistance here.

Maybe there is family pressure to go the medical route and you don't know how to explain Christian Science care to them, not knowing that one's knowledge of the wholeness of Christian Science care may be a help to others in accepting Christian Science care for their loved ones.

Robert Peel's biography of Mary Baker Eddy uncovers a surprising insight – and a definite obstacle to receiving care! Robert Peel writes, "... experience had shown her (Mary Baker Eddy) that some naturally robust Christian Scientists were strongly inclined toward a kind of health snobbery, believing themselves spiritually superior to other Christian Scientists (herself, for instance) who might labor at times under severe physical disabilities." ¹⁹

The flip side of this is that this might also lead to a feeling that if they call on a nurse, they must be really bad off, and must not be a very good Christian Scientist if they are sick or struggling!

Heavens! We all labor at times under challenges and there is no shame in facing a challenge. Period.

¹⁹ Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Authority*, pages 212, 213.

Pride or shame, “health snobbery,” fear of failure or lack of supply, make up those obstacles that would try to hinder one’s natural common sense to receive proper care in line with Christian Science.

Christian Science nursing’s impact on our church communities

The same nursing qualities we just talked about, like cheerfulness, orderliness, etc. also impact our churches. Those qualities of alertness, intuition and proper care will help us become better church members: better Sunday School teachers, Readers, better ushers!

When I think of the role that ushers play, I think about the practical wisdom that they express. A Christian Science nurse is there to guard the sickroom; an usher is there to guard the platform. A Christian Science nurse does much to create that atmosphere of healing and expectation of good. The usher does much to help create an atmosphere of healing and welcome.

I love sharing this story where an usher has a starring role that led to healing in a church service.

Once while serving as Second Reader and very pregnant, I became nauseous, dizzy and faint right in the middle of the church service. I had to sit down. Calmly and without skipping a beat, the First Reader took over both parts. I felt calm, surrounded by Love and wrapped up in a warmth that I had never experienced before. I never was embarrassed or ashamed. I realized that was loved, I was protected and nothing could stop me from being in my right place. I stood up and was able to finish the service – the nausea and faintness just disappeared.

After the service, I went to the usher to tell him how grateful I was for his very effective prayer! He told me: “I came to church with the distinct thought that I needed to pray specifically for the platform. Even all throughout the service, I prayed and affirmed God’s love was right there and I knew that nothing could interrupt God’s messages to us.” His practical wisdom and the proper care of the First Reader had a direct impact on helping me. And all those attending the service experienced healing and a gentle presence of love.

CREATING A HEALING ATMOSPHERE – lessons from our Christian Science nurses

So how can we ensure that this happens consistently? We have so much to learn from the healing atmosphere of a Christian Science nursing facility – what an example! What would happen if every member undertook to deliberately practice Christian Science nursing in some degree in our churches?

In a Christian Science nursing facility, every single person’s job is to contribute to a healing atmosphere.

When I was serving as administrator, it was not uncommon at all to hear from visitors, sales people or those doing inspections of the impact that this healing atmosphere had on them.

One sales person asked “What is it about this place? Yesterday I came in with a headache and when I left it was gone! It is so peaceful here!” A physical therapist who was visiting a friend

who was a patient, commented to me with great respect “You bathe your patients in spirituality!” A social worker commented “Oh, if I ever needed care I would want to come here”

Most of the testimonies of healing where Christian Science nursing is involved will talk of this tangible presence of Love.

Another friend wrote in about his experience in a nursing facility when he was taken into the facility by ambulance:

“When we arrived at (the facility) there was the loud clanging of the double metal doors at the ambulance entrance and then a painful shock as the gurney was unloaded to the ground.

Then the most amazing thing happened. It was as though I was being pushed into a vacuum or into foam. There was no sound, only a sense of peace and quiet; the ride down the hallway was almost painless. It was the responsibility of the paramedics to get me to the bed and off their board, but then three or four Christian Science nurses stepped in and I immediately sense a much softer, gentler touch. There were no painful shocks going through my body as I was settled into a very comfortable bed....By the next afternoon, I was free of all pain and could move my back.....”

How does this happen?

We know that in a facility, behind every patient’s door is a testimony in the making. The thought of each staff member is disciplined, watchful, and expectant.

Every aspect of a Christian Science nurse’s training aligns with Christian Science, and each activity has a spiritual foundation to everything you do.

The whole organization was alive with the confident anticipation that all could tangibly feel Love’s gentle presence, dissolving discord and ushering in healing, and that this was the experience for everyone who came in.

This is what we can see happening in our churches today! This would not add an additional duty here, but can bring out the Christly compassion that already exists. The Christian Science standard of care helps us focus our thought:

- ❑ Thought that is confidently anticipating healing and regeneration and is disciplined and watchful.
- ❑ Thought that openly and lovingly welcomes all --- not judging or afraid.
- ❑ Thought that refreshes – that takes care to see that everything is imbued with a fresh spiritual outlook.

When we deliberately exercise these nursing qualities of spiritual intuition and care, we become better healers and our churches become known for their vibrant and welcoming environment where healing happens.

Answering the larger communities’ questions: a bridge to understanding Christian Science

Christian Science nursing gives us an answer to the larger communities’ questions by acting as a bridge to understanding how we care for another. To those who may have a difficult time understanding how prayer heals and cures, the Christian Science nurse can be a bridge to help

people better understand Christian Science healing. It has been said “If prayer is seen to be something done on a mountaintop, nursing is seen to be right there in the marketplace.”²⁰

There are many instances where an understanding of the role of the Christian Science nurse helped make it easier for a non Christian Science family member or a health care worker to accept another’s choice of Christian Science care.

The spiritual aspect of Christian Science nursing is universal, as universal as mothering and on that basis, Christian Science nursing can build a bridge to other health care workers which can help them better understand Christian Science care and healing. One medically trained nurse after hearing more about Christian Science nursing explained “Oh, that’s why I got into nursing!” She made an immediate connection to the spiritual basis of Christian Science nursing.

Impressing humanity and our public evidence of effective care

Our commitment to provide nursing (and to be nurses) joins with Mary Baker Eddy’s life purpose to “...impress humanity with the genuine recognition of practical, operative Christian Science” as she writes in *Miscellaneous Writings*²¹

How are we doing with that?

Having a nurse on the case does more than just help the patient. It also impacts the patient’s family and friends and neighbors. Having a nursing facility and a nursing service also goes a lot farther than just supporting the patient. It has a rippling effect that goes out to our larger communities.

Actually I have just learned that Beacon Haven has had to enlist 19 different regulatory agencies in order to operate! That’s 19 more agencies who know a little more about Christian Science care. Nineteen agencies with whom we can impress ...with practical, operative Christian Science.

These regulatory agencies – including Medicare – help to give others a recognizable and creditable basis in which to accept Christian Science care as legitimate.

There is something quite profound about having Christian Science nurses and a Christian Science nursing facility in a community. It is the most public evidence of our ability to provide effective care. I want to repeat that simply because this was one of the most surprising things I learned when I was serving as Administrator here. I was constantly talking to others about Christian Science. Having Christian Science nurses and a Christian Science nursing facility in a community is the most public evidence of our ability to provide effective care.

The facility, with its centerpiece of Christian Science nursing, does more than introduce the professional and high standard of Christian Science healing to the community. The facility’s very presence claims that it IS an active part of our larger community.

²⁰ The Foundation for Christian Science Nursing, The Christian Science Board of Directors; copyright 1987

²¹ *Miscellaneous Writings* p. 206

The impact of this involvement should not go unnoticed. It can have a leavening and healing impact on how that community feels and accepts the practice of Christian Science in their own backyards.

The regular dialogues a nursing organization has with the various government, business and healthcare networks of a community can provide a way to jumpstart conversations and help others understand the role of the Christian Science nurse and Christian Science practice. This does much “...to impress humanity with the genuine recognition of practical, operative Christian Science.”²² as well as “to maintain ...the dignity and *defense* of our Cause.”²³

Our firm foundation to caring for one another sets a standard that blesses all

We can confidently answer the question of a family member, a legislator, a doctor, ethicist or college student “How do we care for one another?” by realizing that our community of care has a solid history and a firm and tested foundation.

The practitioners, nurses and facilities and nursing services, caring members put a face on this community. In this community of caring, we are daily proving that there is a way to nurse and to heal wholly based on spiritual principles and this heals us, enlivens our churches and shows the world the highest form of care.

Thank you!

²² *Miscellaneous Writings* p. 206

²³ *Miscellaneous Writings* p. 148

