

U.C.C. WELLNESS MINISTRIES TOOLKIT
Section 3

EXEMPLARS OF WELLNESS MINISTRIES ACTIVITIES

Spiritual Health and Wellness

Title: *Knitting for a Purpose – A Prayer Shawl Ministry of Sharing*

Age groups served: Adults

Reason for development and implementation: Wrapping in love

Wrapping up in a soft knitted shawl can be mood-changing. But, when that shawl is made with love and is prayed over during and after construction, it becomes a blessing. In 1998, Janet Bristow and Victoria Galo, graduates of the *1997 Women's Leadership Institute* at *The Hartford Seminary* in Hartford, CT, combined the desire to offer care and the love of knitting into a prayerful ministry. Prayer shawl ministries reach out to those in need of comfort and solace. The ministry has been adopted by churches across the country and worldwide.

Sharing the story:

A knitter in our congregation heard about the new ministry of Prayer Shawl Knitting. She was an accomplished knitter willing to share her time and talent with others. After gathering the recommended supplies, she announced that she was inviting all interested knitters and "want to be knitters" to gather in a room at the church from 10 to 12 on Thursdays to create prayer shawls. That was the beginning of our Prayer Shawl Ministry.

The recommended yarn is a bulky acrylic, Lion Brand Homespun that is washable. Three skeins of the same die lot create an ample shawl with fringe. The cost of three skeins ranges from \$18 to \$26. Straight needles size 11 or 13 and long enough to hold 57 stitches are recommended. The one-time expense for the aluminum needles is from \$9.00 to \$12.00. This new ministry was off to an easy start when knitters shared extra pairs of needles with the newbies. A donation covered the initial cost of the yarn for the group. The purchase of additional skeins of yarn when it went on sale was made possible by further donations.

Love and prayers are knitted into every colorful shawl with the intention that the recipients will be wrapped in the warmth of God's amazing grace and love. Once a year, all completed shawls, the shawls in process, and skeins of yarn are displayed at the front of the sanctuary. An update on the scope of the ministry is shared. The congregation is invited to pray for the blessings provided to others through this ministry. A special offering is taken for the purchase of more supplies. This ministry has so touched some congregants they help purchase more yarn regularly. We have never run short of yarn.

The shawls are gifts for anybody in need of comfort and caring. Members of the congregation freely distribute the shawls to anyone who may need comfort. More than 1,100 shawls have been created, prayed over, and distributed to children and adults across the country to service men and women, college students, and friends living abroad. Small white prayer shawls are also made to wrap babies when being baptized.

Evaluation:

- Over time both the leadership and the participants have changed; however, the longevity of this active ministry reveals the blessings the knitters themselves receive.
- Thursday from 10 – 12 has become "prayer shawl knitting time," whether the knitter can be with others at the church or is away on vacation or for the winter. The sense of community between the knitters has grown beyond actually being present.
- Congregants take shawls to friends and family members, and they receive appreciation. The Minister of Health or the pastor is sometimes asked to make a delivery. These can become very emotional experiences when the recipient becomes overwhelmed by the love and care that enfolds them. Sufficient time is scheduled for these visits to explore thoughts and feelings when desired.
- The knitters have also shared their skills in other ways. A high school senior needed a shawl to wear to her senior prom but didn't have the means to buy one. The knitters helped the girl design and make a shawl. She learned a new hobby, and the smile on her face on prom night displayed a new level of self-confidence.
- Comfort is provided to grieving parents. Babies sometimes die when a woman experiences complications during pregnancy or delivery. The knitters have made buntings and hats for the nurses to put on those infants before giving the deceased child to the family members to hold. The parents appreciate that their child is wrapped in more than a light flannel blanket.

Next steps:

- Continue to enable the ministry to evolve as the participants share their love, laughter, and prayers for themselves and all that are served.

Resources:

- [The Prayer Shawl Ministry Home Page](#) shares information developed and collected for the past 24 years. There is practical information such as how to start a group, shawl instructions for knitters and crocheters, and a downloadable brochure. Other topics include the shawl's symbolism, prayers, and ministry outreach. The Shawl Links tab allows you to find other churches with a prayer shawl ministry.
- *Knitting into the Mystery – A Guide to the Shawl-Knitting Ministry* (2003). Izard, S & Jorgensen, S., NY: Morehouse and other publications provide information.