

Vanessa Burks County Bio

Vanessa Burks County is the Program Manager of Congregational Wellness (CW) a division of Baptist Community Ministries (BCM) in New Orleans. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, a Masters of Social Work and a diploma in Christian Ministry. As a pioneer in the area of health and wellness ministry in Southeast Louisiana, she began this 20 year career at BCM with a very small team of nurses and clergy who understood the vision that Granger Westberg espoused. In spite of natural disasters and falling financial markets and with much tenacity and resilience, Vanessa played an integral role in duplicating what Rev. Westberg created in the Mid-west, in the Greater New Orleans area.

Seeing the need to broaden the scope of wellness ministry beyond church nurse leadership, Vanessa developed and implemented a lay wellness ministry concept in 2004 The Congregational Health Promoter Program is a core program of BCM-CW that trains lay leaders to develop wellness ministries in local churches. The program, a gateway into the CW network, provides continuing education, technical assistance, financial support and serves as a resource center for 292 trained lay leaders.

Vanessa played a key role in the development and implementation of the Strategies to Trim and Reduce (STAR) Project (2011), a weight loss and blood pressure lowering education-focused support group. She provides day-to-day oversight to this program, executing revisions in how the program is implemented, updates to curriculum materials and training modifications where needed. Recently, Vanessa transformed the STAR Project into a virtual program to meet the needs of the community in light of COVID-19.

Vanessa is a founding committee member of the Behavioral Health Initiative for Pastors (2017) a self-care program that provide strategies, tools and resources for pastors and their families. Vanessa has continued to be innovative in providing services and resources to pastors throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental Health First Aid certification is one such service. Vanessa is a certified Mental Health First Aid Instructor, providing certification courses for pastors as well as Church (Parish) Nurses and Congregational Health Promoters in the CW network. She is certified to offer the course in-person and virtually.

The REMEDIUM, the division's newsletter, was created and developed by Vanessa in 2002. She has given oversight to its transformation from an email based publication to a web-based publication with over 700 monthly subscribers. She continues to serve as an editor and is the principal writer for its inspirational column, Be Inspired.

In her personal ministry, Vanessa founded Alabaster Ministries, Inc. a bible-based group that study scripture and provide charitable gifts to the needy. Vanessa, is a bible teacher and conducts praise and worship workshops, health and healing seminars and church growth workshops for local congregations.