Message from Dr. Kit Chesla, USA,  
President of the International Family Nursing Association  

December 2014  

As the President of the International Family Nursing Association (IFNA), I’m happy to share my thoughts with the readership of the IFNA December 2014 Newsletter. If you are an IFNA member, I hope you recognize yourself in my description. If you are not a member, I invite you to join us!!

At base, volunteerism is what holds IFNA together and makes it successful. Small and large voluntary efforts enable IFNA to address its mission of transforming health for families worldwide. As I look over the accomplishments of IFNA since it began in 2009 and at all of the International Family Nursing Conferences held since 1988, I am awestruck at the strength and generosity that resides within the ranks of family nurses. A vast amount of work is completed every month by individual members and small groups in order to fulfill the mission of IFNA. I will note a few examples of the creative, intelligent contributions that are completed behind the scenes by members. Unfortunately this list of examples cannot be complete, as there are too many activities occurring simultaneously to allow all to be acknowledged.

The United Nations website points out that “Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.” (http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/volunteerism/ December 4, 2014). Similarly, volunteerism benefits our organization as a whole, enabling many of our initiatives to move forward that would otherwise not exist, as well as the benefitting individuals who devote time to furthering an IFNA agenda or goal.

Trust  
I remember the first time I attended an International Family Nursing Conference in Portland in 1991. I had attended the National Council on Family Relations annual conferences for more than 5 years and had a group of colleagues there whom I knew, trusted, and with whom I could socialize. But with the 2nd International Family Nursing Conference in Portland, I was beginning again, unsure of whom I might meet and whether I would find my niche. It took some time but eventually, the International Family Nursing Conferences became my key place to find nurses across the country--and eventually the world--who shared a passion for families. And the best way that I found to strengthen those relationships was to work together on projects. Struggling in unison to refine the language of a document or to sketch out a conference theme created ties that lasted. For example the IFNA Position Statement on Pre-Licensure Family Nursing Education is a document that was created by 11 authors (http://internationalfamilynursing.org/2014/11/18/ifna-position-statement-on-pre-licensure-family-nursing-education/). Certainly not all of the authors were equally involved, but each had input, and it’s likely that those who worked the hardest walked away with the utmost pride in the document, and the closest ties to the colleagues with whom they shared the effort. Collaborative work can create trust, and lasting friendships.
Solidarity
What unites family nurses is a commitment to improving the health of families. For those who are especially focused on teaching family nursing, sharing curricula or teaching strategies in publications, presentations and via the IFNA website creates solidarity in approach. Similarly, those focused on practice find in each others’ practice imaginative approaches and novel ideas for family interventions. Solidarity in research occurs by sharing methods, instruments and philosophical approaches to science. The key way that IFNA members remain unified is via our website. The IFNA Communications Committee, led by Drs. Sharon Denham, Janice Bell, Wendy Looman, and more recently by Wilma Schroeder has been devoted to creating opportunities for members to share ideas and resources with one another. The design and success of the website is due to this committee’s ceaseless effort to create an online meeting place for IFNA members. Our solidarity and connection is largely due to their vision and countless hours of voluntary effort. We owe them tremendous thanks.

Reciprocity
Having had the opportunity to serve on the Board of IFNA since its inception, I have been struck by the effort by all board members, to keep the workings of IFNA transparent and democratic. Of course, board members have to make decisions about what is best for IFNA at any particular juncture. However, the spirit of board work has consistently been to try to gauge the wishes of the members, either by formal surveys or via inquiries with committees and individuals. Board members are thoughtful about how best to address member’s wishes, even when these wishes are not unified. And it should be emphasized that board members, like all IFNA leaders, committee members, task force members and so on, volunteer their time to IFNA’s initiatives. So there is a hope that the effort expended benefits both the individual and the organization.

In closing, I want to express my appreciation to all IFNA members for the spirit of volunteerism that is so pervasive in our organization. If it weren’t for your efforts, then IFNA would not have grown in size and influence in the manner that it has been able to grow. It is a wonderful achievement to have, at our most robust, more than 400 family educators, researchers and practitioners dedicated to the same mission. With your continued efforts, we can indeed transform health for families worldwide.