

Valparaiso University

ValpoScholar

---

Diaconalogue

Lutheran Diaconal Association

---

4-1985

## Diaconalogue, No. 4

Lutheran Deaconess Association, Inc.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/diaconalogue>

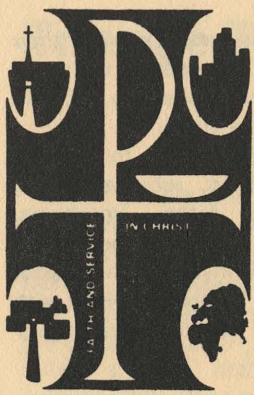


Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

---

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Lutheran Diaconal Association at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Diaconalogue by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at [scholar@valpo.edu](mailto:scholar@valpo.edu).





# Diaconalogue

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE LUTHERAN DEACONESS ASSOCIATION, INC., TO ENHANCE THE DIALOGUE AND EXCHANGE AMONG PEOPLE WITH DIACONAL HEARTS

NUMBER 4 APRIL 1985

## Foundations

### *Diakonia*

Welcome to our fourth issue of *Diaconalogue*.

In the first three issues, we have introduced you to several individuals who, in their daily lives, have shown how diaconal ministry is a part of how they live their new lives in Christ. This fourth issue takes on a slightly different format. Susan, a deaconess and a mother, tells of her experiences and thoughts about mothering as ministry. You will also get a glimpse of how a support group, such as the one at St. John Lutheran Church in Salem, Oregon, can help individuals become more effective caregivers.

"Diaconal" is not a word you will hear everyday. In fact, you will probably seldom hear it even on Sunday. It comes from a Greek word, *diakonia*, which is usually translated "service." The term "deaconess" comes from the same word. To be "diaconal" is to be of the same heart as Christ . . . to have compassion for the sick, the hungry, the neglected, the lonely, the ignorant, the frightened people in our midst . . . and to act out of that compassion in our relationships and encounters with others.

While deaconesses make a commitment to a life of *diakonia* all Christians are called to *diakonia* through their baptism. As we "put on Christ" in our baptism, we also take on the nature of Christ . . . even the diaconal heart of Christ.

Blessings on your *diakonia*!

## The Confessions of a Deaconess-Mother

by Susan Wacker-Roepke

"I shouldn't have been a mother!" I thought to myself as I walked in the door. I've said it before, but today it was really obvious.

After spending an exhausting morning with ten preschoolers at work, I was now faced with my own exceptionally cranky nineteen month old son. I rarely read my daily horoscope, but today it provided me with a good laugh — "You will have a difficult time with your children."

By three this afternoon, my horoscope became more accurate. My son wasn't just cranky, he was suffering from a fever. Now I was faced with what seemed to be a monumental decision — do I take him to the doctor, for what may turn into a two hour ordeal in the waiting room, only to hear, "It's just a virus going around, and there is really nothing we can do," or should I stay home and take the chance that he is seriously ill?

And what about the friends we invited for dinner tonight — should I call and cancel the invitation or just go ahead and prepare the stroganoff?

"AAAhhhh!!!!"

What a time for the phone to ring and to be asked to write an article on mothering as ministry!

"But I have more questions than answers or advice," I confessed. "I'm

(continued on next page)



## ... Confessions

(continued from front page)

not sure I'm the right person for this assignment. I'm too new at this mothering thing, and besides, I haven't really figured out what I think this 'Mothering as Ministry' business myself."

Yet, I didn't say "no." I want to struggle with this issue. Being a mother is one part of my identity. As a deaconess and a baptized Christian, being a minister is part of my identity. Integrating the two aspects of my life is essential.

But, doesn't every mother alive keep a mental file that is labeled "It Was One of Those Days!" And, when asked, "How's it going?" she can recall an appropriate anecdote. All I need to do is to make a few phone calls to hear some of the most recent accounts. "He smeared a whole stick of butter into the couch!" "I found her playing in the toilet . . . again!" "They are so whiny today, I think I am going out of my mind!"

Yes, I would readily admit that mothering is a **demanding** task. That word has taken on a whole new meaning since I became a mother! I used to think the ten to twelve hours I worked as a parish deaconess were demanding, and they were. The mentally exhausting days I spent working among the hungry, the homeless, the lonely men, women, and children of Chicago's Uptown neighborhood were also demanding.

But I came into mothering unaware of the physical and emotional demands of caring for a child on a daily basis . . . no evenings or weekends off . . . no two week vacations after six months . . . no monthly or annual evaluations where I

can chart my accomplishments. Every day brings more of the same demands.

Also, it was easier to identify myself as being "in ministry" when I served in the parish and in the neighborhood ministry. I was recognized as a minister by many people. I received encouragement from those around me for my service. Now, I am one more mother doing the things mothers do. What is so special about that?

There's a line in the Deaconess Litany — a prayer that is prayed by deaconesses across the country — that I especially find helpful in this struggle: "Enlighten our eyes to see you in our needy neighbor."

Could "neighbor" include those living closest to us? Even under the same roof? Our children? Maybe, in him is my opportunity to meet Christ, and an opportunity to serve — to do ministry.

Surely, the opportunity I have to meet Christ in this child is not so different than the opportunity to meet Christ in the hungry and homeless I used to meet on a daily basis. Deep down, I believe there isn't any other job I could have that would allow me to have a more profound impact on a person than mothering. And that is an awe-full thought to me. I feel so humbled.

One great truth about ministry, or servanthood, that is very meaningful to me, is that ministry is always two-way. In other words, a servant will most often find that in the process of giving, she receives, often more than she gives.

Maybe that is why, along with that mental file labeled "It Was One of Those Days," we who are mothers also keep a file labeled "Joys and Rewards" that is filled to overflowing with our child's

smiles and hugs, with memories of their first steps, with all the special words of wisdom they've ever spoken to us, and with all of their "I love you's."

The call to servanthood — to ministry — comes to all of us, whether nurse, farmer, electrician, father, mechanic, teacher, pastor, clerk, and yes, even mother!

May you find Christ hidden in your needy neighbor, and "there serve Him with gladness!" even, and especially when your neighbor is your child.

*Deaconess Susan Wacker-Roepke, Staunton, Virginia, is one of the leaders for the upcoming Gatherings for Mothers in St. Louis and Omaha. She served in a parish in Buffalo, New York, and at Chicago Uptown Ministry on Chicago's northside. In Chicago, she worked with the Mother/Child Preschool Program, with Food Assistance, and with worship. She has one child, Joshua, 1½. Susan currently works part-time with preschool children and continues to grow in her understanding of mothering as ministry. She graduated from Valparaiso in 1978.*

### Diaconalogue

Editor: Deaconess Diane Greve  
Mailing Address:  
Center for Diaconal Ministry  
Deaconess Hall  
Valparaiso, IN 46383  
(219) 464-5033

**Diaconalogue** is published quarterly by the Lutheran Deaconess Association, Inc., Valparaiso, IN. The suggested contribution for four issues is \$5.00.

Articles from **Diaconalogue** may be reprinted with acknowledgement. Organizations doing so are required to send us a copy of that publication.

From its beginning in 1919, the Lutheran Deaconess Association has been dedicated to a three-fold task: recruiting and educating women for the diaconate, supporting deaconesses in their ministries, and serving the church in its diaconal mission.

This newsletter is designed to affirm and encourage laity who do "diakonia" so that we can learn from, encourage, and support each other in our Christian service. In this way, we hope to serve the church in a new way.

## Motherhood as Vocation

This resource consists of two articles reprinted from the **Cresset**, a publication of Valparaiso University. They were originally presented at the first Gathering for Mothers held in Valparaiso in 1982. The first one, written by Deaconess Karen Melang, is "The Call to the Diaper Pail." In this, she discusses the term "vocation" and how that applies to mothering. Karen will be one of the two leaders for the Gatherings for Mothers in St. Louis and Asheville.

The second article was delivered as a homily by Deaconess Louise Williams entitled "Riddles, Parables, and the Kingdom of God" (Mark 4:26-32). Here she

compares raising and caring for children to planting mustard seeds and waiting for the Kingdom of God to arrive.

Both provide nurture and encouragement for mothers in a gentle and insightful manner. They would be ideal as gifts for mothers in your congregation or for personal nourishment.

Single copies are available at no cost. Multiple copies \$7.50 @ dozen. They are available from:

Lutheran Deaconess Association  
Center for Diaconal Ministry  
Deaconess Hall  
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383  
(219) 464-5033



# Triangle Tippers

by Donna King

*For people who are intentional about caring for others, being a member of a supportive group is invaluable. Deaconess Donna King spent some time talking with several members of a Stephen Series group at St. John Lutheran Church in Salem, Oregon. MARY is a nurse in a private clinic, DALE is one of the parish pastors, VERNA is a homemaker and part-time teacher, CLARENCE is a retired university professor, and DONNA is a Lutheran campus minister at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.*

It was the Sunday before Christmas . . . the usher answered the phone in the church office just as the pastor stepped toward the pulpit. The voice of the man sounded desperate. He was depressed, said he wanted to commit suicide and needed someone to talk to.

Suppose you were that usher. What would you have done? Would you feel capable to help the man yourself? If not, who could you have called on for help?

Having people in your congregation who have learned how to effectively help and care for others can be a life-saver in a situation like this one. Let's listen in as a group of people from a congregation like yours talk about the way they responded to this man's cry for help and about the benefits they see in being part of a supportive training group.

**DALE:**

When the usher said to me, "Someone is suicidal," and neither Pastor Neidner nor myself could leave the service, I immediately thought, "Get a Stephen Minister."

**MARY:**

My husband was the usher . . . and in his panic over the situation the only Stephen Minister he could think of was me. So he came to me and whispered, "Come here." He wouldn't tell me what was going on. I followed him to the church office where I was handed the phone. He told me that this man was suicidal and asked me to find out if he had a weapon.

I listened as the man told of his life and his despair. At one point he hung up and wouldn't answer the phone when we called him back. The only person who knew for sure where he lived was sitting in back of the congregation behind the organ. So, we sent for him. By this time the entire congregation knew something

was going on. After worship folks wanted to know what was happening — they were very concerned.

We kept calling, the man finally answered and we were able to make a contract to talk again. He's coming to worship now and is beginning to make some changes for his future.

**DONNA:**

In that kind of a crucial situation, it sounds like your training really paid off. As you grow as ministering persons, what insights do you see resulting from your service? Do you see an impact on your congregation?

**VERNA:**

I'm learning that people have answers within themselves. We don't have to have the answers. We're listeners, not advice givers.

**CLARENCE:**

I see having training classes as an opportunity for people to ask for help if they need it . . . the classes also become avenues for giving.

**VERNA:**

We gain courage. So often we think of things that might be nice to do . . . having the self-identity as "helper" brings an urge to do them.

**CLARENCE:**

My wife sends out cards to people with special needs. One elderly woman who had received a card while hospitalized was back in church. My wife saw this woman kneeling at the altar during communion and put her hand on her shoulder as she passed by.

At first the woman withdrew, but as she looked up and saw who it was she seemed to relax. After worship she said to my wife, "You're my touching friend." Whether she'd been touched or not before we'll never know.

**MARY:**

I see people who get involved beginning to feel fulfilled. I see people going to talk to others after church where before they would have stood alone. My first assignment was with an older, prominent lady. I was nervous because there was so much difference in our ages. I think she was taken aback at who was there to minister to her. But, after our first meeting we both felt good. We met each other as people.

Now I know that listening is doing, before I would have said, "I'm getting as much out of this as the ones I help. I feel like I'm a part of ministry.

**DALE:**

The Chinese picture the word for crisis as either danger or opportunity. We see the Stephen Ministers as triangle tippers . . . picture an upside down triangle with its tip for its base as the crisis. On

one side of the triangle is danger; on the other side is the opportunity for growth.

We see the involvement of Stephen Ministers as tipping the triangle towards the growth coming out of crisis. It's not uncommon for those who have gone through a lot of personal struggles and received this kind of support to join the training class and begin giving support to others.

**VERNA:**

It's important to realize that the triangle will tip, one way or the other . . . it depends on what one sees.

**MARY:**

I see over and over again the need for people to talk. Even those who are surrounded by others are often actually feeling alone. This experience has opened my eyes to needs I didn't realize before.

**DONNA:**

As persons who are involved in a lot of "behind the scenes" ministry, I imagine there's not much recognition for the kinds of growth you've helped along in people. At times, it seems that the more one gives the more people want . . . what keeps you going?

**MARY:**

Because of the confidentiality involved we really can't celebrate the victories people have. But we see them in lots of little ways!

**CLARENCE:**

What keeps me going is the response of the people in the training classes. They keep coming. A lot of mutual ministry goes on among us.

**VERNA:**

Burnout can get to be a problem. I'm taking a break right now. We take turns . . . all of us experience both sides of being a helper and being helped sometimes.

**DONNA:**

If you met someone else who was involved in caring ministry, what would you want to say to them?

**DALE:**

Keep doing it — the need is there!

**CLARENCE:**

Weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice.

**VERNA:**

It's like with my teenager, it's a hard age . . . when we talk and I can remember to use my new listening skills, I get a little bit more and a little bit more. There's a fine line between opening doors and closing them. I'd tell others to be there . . . if you're there, the love and care will be there too.

**MARY:**

The reward is at the moment . . . the point is you were there.

(continued on back page)



# Compassion

## A Reflection of the Christian Life

by Donald P. McNeill  
Douglas A. Morrison  
Henri J. M. Nouwen

For people in ministry, the spiritual foundations from which our love and concern flows is all important. Without a firm footing in our faith, the acts of love become burdens of guilt. We need to constantly remember and experience the power of God's continual care and compassion.

Compassion is a book that says "no" to a compassion of guilt and failure and "yes" to a compassionate love that pervades our spirit and moves us to action. It offers the reader new and fresh insights into three dimensions of compassion: The Compassionate God, The Compassionate Life, and The Compassionate Way.

In order to give a flavor of the style of the book, we have several excerpts for your personal reflection.

*As long as the help we offer to others is motivated primarily by the changes we may accomplish, our service cannot last long. When results do not appear, when success is absent, when we are no longer liked or praised for what we do, we lose the strength and motivation to continue. When we see nothing but sad, poor, sick, or miserable people who, even after our many attempts to offer help, remain sad, poor, sick, and miserable, then the only reasonable response is to move away in order to prevent ourselves from becoming cynical or depressed. Radical servanthood challenges us, while attempting persistently to overcome poverty, hunger, illness, and any other form of human misery, to reveal the gentle presence of our compassionate God in the midst of our broken world.*

*Each time we make participation in human suffering a final goal, a purpose, or an ideal, we distort our Christian vocation and harm ourselves as well as our fellow human beings. This becomes eminently clear in the lives of the saints and of all deeply committed Christians. Their eyes are not focused on pain, but on the Lord. Their question is not, "How can I suffer most for God?" but, "How can I listen best to him?"*

*God is a compassionate God. That is the good news brought to us in and through Jesus Christ. He is God-with-us, who finds nothing human alien and who lives in solidarity with us. He is a servant God who washes our feet and heals our wounds, and he is an obedient God who listens and responds to his divine Father with unlimited love. In fellowship with Jesus Christ, we are called to be compassionate as our Father is compassionate. In and through him, it becomes possible to be effective witnesses to God's compassion and to be signs of hope in the midst of a despairing world.*

*Servanthood too is a quality of the community. Our individual ability to serve is quite limited. We might be able to help a few people for a while, but to respond in servanthood to all people all the time is not a realistic human aspiration. As soon as we speak in terms of we, however, the picture changes. As a community, we can transcend our individual limitations and become a concrete realization of the selfemptying way of Christ. This communal realization can then find a specific expression in the daily work of the individual members. Some people work well with teenagers, others with the elderly, others with hospital patients, and others with prisoners. As individuals, we cannot be everything to everyone, but as a community we can indeed serve a great variety of needs. Moreover, by the constant support and encouragement of the community we find it possible to remain faithful to our commitment to service.*

*As long as our primary concern in life is to be interesting and thus worthy of special attention, compassion cannot manifest itself.*

The book is written in an easy-to-read format which allows the reader to read and ponder two or three page sections at a time without losing the flow of thought. It is a good resource for personal reflection.

It is available from:

Image Books  
Doubleday & Company, Inc.  
Garden City, New York  
\$5.95 142 pp. 1983

# Mother's Gathering

The LDA will be sponsoring four regional weekend gatherings in 1985 to affirm mothering as a diaconal vocation. These will be held in:

St. Louis, Missouri . . . . . June 7-9  
Monroe, Michigan . . . . . June 28-30  
Omaha, Nebraska . . . . . July 26-28  
Asheville, North Carolina . . Oct. 25-27

Topics for discussion include "Messages I Get About Mothering," "Needs/Nurture," "Values and Decisions" and "Relationship with your Child." Worship, Bible study, and small group discussions assist in providing the spiritual and personal dimension. It is especially designed for mothers of young children. Child care is available.

Affirmation and support is the main focus of the event. Mothers are important. Mothering is a ministry — a diaconal ministry. The weekend is designed to help that message come through.

Registration is \$75 for each mother. Scholarship assistance is available through a grant from Aid Association for Lutherans as well as from local groups and congregations.

For more information, write or call the Lutheran Deaconess Association, Deaconess Hall, Valparaiso, IN 46383. 219/464-5033.

## Triangle Tippers

(continued from inside)

*Deaconess Donna King is a Lutheran Campus Minister at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon, where she also teaches in the Honors College. She has studied at the Center for Faith Development, Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.*

*After her conversation with the group at St. John, she commented, "I found their enthusiasm and sincerity quite encouraging. The memory will be a good one for my frustrating days."*

*The Stephen Series is a congregationally-based program designed to equip people for a caring ministry. For more information on their program, write or call:*

Stephen Ministries  
1325 Boland  
St. Louis, Missouri 63117  
(314) 645-5511