



Deaconess Community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Board of Directors

The Rev. Herbert E. Anderson, Sonoma, Calif. (2016) ³
 Sr. Krista M. Anderson, Hawley, Minn. (*ex officio*)
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 Sr. Mary Julia McKenzie, Sellersville, Pa. (*ex officio*)
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 Sr. Jean Widmeyer, *secretary*, Ontario, Canada (2018) ^{1,4}

¹ Executive Committee
² Committee on Governance
³ Committee on Vocation and Education
⁴ Committee on Mission Support
⁵ Committee on Community Life
⁶ Committee on Finance and Budget
⁷ Committee on Communications

Adviser

The Rev. Cherlyne V. Beck, Chicago, Ill.

Leadership staff

Sr. Krista M. Anderson, *director for vocation and education*
 Sr. Mary Julia McKenzie, *interim director of operations*

Statement of purpose

The Deaconess Community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) exercises its ministry within the context of the church's mission to proclaim the gospel, relate the gospel to human need in every situation, and extend the ministry of the gospel to all the world. Serving through community and in partnership with the other public ministries of the church, skilled and committed deaconesses minister to those in need, especially the marginalized, and equip, encourage and further the ministry of the whole people of God. The governing description of this separately incorporated ministry appears in ELCA continuing resolution 16.12.A16.a. See Section XII of the *Pre-Assembly Report*.

Mission

Compelled by the love of Christ and sustained by community, members of the Deaconess Community devote their lives to proclaiming the gospel through ministries of mercy and servant leadership.

Vision

Empowered by the Spirit for public ministry, the community passionately seeks to:

- embody its mission;
- be a Christ-centered community of women; and
- witness to Christ's church and the world.

Core values

- A gospel-centered purpose that proclaims and furthers the reign of God among us
- A prophetic diakonia that commits itself to risk-taking and innovative service on the frontiers of this church's outreach
- Cooperative partnerships that invite participation, bridge divisions and accompany others in mission
- Inclusivity in mission that affirms the individual gifts of all people
- Stewardship that respects God's gifts of time, talents and resources

Historical context

The Deaconess Community carries a long, rich history and tradition that dates back to the earliest acts of the apostles. Documents from the early second century record the existence of women who served as deaconesses and were even martyred for it.

In the 19th century, the Rev. Theodor Fliedner, a Lutheran pastor from Kaiserswerth, Germany, and his wife, Friederike (and after her death, his wife, Caroline), led a revival of the ancient diaconate. In a society that still regarded a woman's place as solely in the home, they trained women to venture outside and minister to the poor and forgotten members of society. By the mid- to late-19th century, their work had expanded across Europe and to the United States, where they exemplified Jesus' ministry of mercy through work in orphanages, prisons, schools, hospitals, hospices, and institutions for children and adults with mental or physical challenges. Today many Lutheran social service agencies worldwide can trace their origins to the work of these deaconesses.

The origin of the Deaconess Community in the United States dates to 1884 when seven deaconesses were brought from Germany to superintend the German Hospital in Philadelphia. Thus began the Philadelphia Motherhouse of Deaconesses. Then in 1889 the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States established the Order of Deaconesses. This in turn led to the creation of the Deaconess Board and then the Deaconess Community in Baltimore. The General Synod designated deaconesses to hold office in the church. A third deaconess community, including Immanuel Lutheran Hospital, was established in Omaha, Neb., in 1890. These three communities came together to form the present Deaconess Community in the mid-1960s at the time of the merger that created the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).

The community uniquely serves both the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) thanks to its earlier relationship with the LCA, which served both the United States and Canada. Prior to the ELCA's formation, provision was made to give members of the Deaconess Community full accreditation in both denominations.

From the beginning of the LCA until 2002, the Deaconess Community operated a single center in Gladwyne, Pa., near Philadelphia. It provided a retirement residence, a center for study and retreat, and administrative offices. The community sold the Gladwyne property in 2002 and moved its offices to the Lutheran Center in Chicago in 2003.

Today's community (with members living in diaspora) is embodied by the sisters' support and encouragement of one another, in prayer and in one another's company. The Deaconess Community has a 12-person board of directors, of which six are deaconesses. Its highest decision-making body is the Deaconess Community in Assembly, which includes all sisters and candidates. The assembly gathers annually to share in worship and Bible study, conduct community business and engage in missionary activities. The assemblies reserve a significant portion of time for community-building events and activities.

Report of work for 2014-2016

The Deaconess Community today carries forward the work of its historic counterparts in areas just as diverse and needed. Over the past several years, with the help of God's Spirit, the community has been discerning its mission in the 21st century, bolstering its spiritual core, and examining its organizational structure while continuing to reach out in extending Christ's love to all God's children.

At the end of 2015, 74 deaconesses were residing or serving in 21 states and four Canadian provinces. In 2016, 10 candidates are awaiting entrance, investiture or consecration into the community.

Deaconesses currently serve in a wide range of vocational settings—both church related and, by call to extraordinary ministry, in secular institutions. These settings include institutions of learning, hospitals, social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, congregations, hospitals and elder care facilities.

Using existing and innovative technologies, the organization continues to build community by offering the "Monday Night Prayer Group" via Zoom, which meets the fourth Monday of each month, and "The Verse of the Day," which goes out to the entire community on a daily basis and commemorates any sister whose birthday or consecration falls on that date. Sisters volunteer to choose a month and provide a scriptural verse and reflection for each day.

The community, which understands itself in the context of the church's wider public ministry, has been participating with associates in ministry, diaconal ministers and clergy in the ongoing conversation concerning "word and service" ministry. The Deaconess Community also seeks to reach beyond itself in faithful stewardship of its resources for the benefit of the marginalized and those in need, in encouragement for all God's children to discipleship and to engage in

service for the sake of God's mission in the world. Two examples of that outreach are mission grants and the diaconal ministry program.

1) Mission support grants

Through mission grants, the Deaconess Community lifts up the ministries of agencies that share its mission and core values. For the three-year grant cycles, mission grants were funded totaling \$539,500.

2013-2014	\$181,500
2014-2015	\$181,500
2015-2016	\$176,500
Total	\$539,500

Since the inception of the program in 2004, grants totaling \$2,052,500 have been distributed to 84 agencies. (A list of grant recipients and guidelines for grant applications is available on the community's website, ELCA.org/deaconess.) More than 21 percent of each year's operating budget is committed to the mission grant program.

2) Diaconal ministry: History, formation and spirituality course

The Deaconess Community is committed to providing formation opportunities for deaconess candidates, as well as others discerning a call to rostered leadership, either in their candidacy process or serving in rostered ministry. Since 2006 the community has commissioned and funded a January elective course on diaconal ministry that has been offered through Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., and held at the Mount Olivet Conference & Retreat Center in Farmington, Minn., in 2015 and 2016. The course introduces the historical, theological and social contexts of diaconal (word and service) ministry throughout history; provides opportunity for discussion on vocation and diaconal calling; and affirms and encourages recognition of the importance and knowledge of the Lutheran Confessions as theologically and spiritually founded writings.

In 2016, 19 students, representing six seminaries, two countries and four denominations (including synod staff, word and sacrament and word and service candidates, and those discerning a call to rostered leadership), participated in the course. The instructors were Dr. Susan W. McArver, professor of church history and educational ministries at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C.; and Dr. Dirk G. Lange, associate professor of worship at Luther Seminary.

The 2017 January elective will be offered through Luther Seminary. The onsite component of the course will be held at Spirit in the Desert Retreat Center in Carefree, Ariz., Jan. 15-20.

Financial summary

The Deaconess Community is an independent and separately incorporated ministry of the ELCA and, as such, receives no funding from the ELCA or the ELCIC. Its operating budget is funded primarily through distributions from four investment accounts that function as endowments—two of which were established with proceeds from the sale of the Gladwyne, Pa., property. A fifth account, invested with the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust, serves as a reserve for support of the annual diaconal ministry course. Annual withdrawals from each account are governed by a spending policy so their values are preserved over time.

Year	Budgeted income	Budgeted expenses	Actual expenses	Gifts to ELCA/ELCIC
2011	\$894,491	\$891,692	\$871,460	\$15,435
2012	\$824,027	\$806,215	\$684,444	\$20,000
2013	\$864,704	\$864,174	\$1,087,476	\$242,947
2014	\$894,135	\$914,399	\$920,331	\$122,043
2015	\$952,776	\$951,715	\$933,186	\$50,000

Major directions for 2016-2019

The Deaconess Community looks forward to the 2016 Churchwide Assembly, in particular the possibility of creating a roster of “word and service.” It is an important time full of possibilities for creative and imaginative new frontiers. Recognizing the legacy of each of the present lay rosters provides energy and inspiration to look forward to the future where we will all serve in word and service.

Responding to God’s mission, the Deaconess Community will continue to live into its sustaining and motivating prayer life; engage in community discernment while exploring organizational perspectives to nurture the health and vision of the community; faithfully use its financial resources through sustainable responsible investing and advocacy, as well as providing mission grants; and work to develop leaders through the diaconal ministry educational formation course and community education.

Rooted in the unchanging grace of God in an evolving world and inspired by the example of our deaconess forebears who courageously and innovatively carried Christ’s love and freeing word into the needy world of their day, the Deaconess Community seeks faithfully and fluidly to carry on a ministry of serving love and prophetic diakonia in the present time so the reign of God may flourish. Through example and teaching, the community is committed to serving this church and the world as it fosters community and empowers others in service.

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Sr. Mary Julia McKenzie, *interim director of operations*

The Rev. Violet I. Meek, *chair*