



Diaconal Ministry: A Life of Service

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Diaconal Ministry: A Life of Service



By Kelly Howard and Linda Zawaski

Did you know that two people from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod were consecrated recently as diaconal ministers?

Kelly Howard and Linda Zawaski share the journey as diaconal ministers in this synod. Both graduated from Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, with affiliation to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

But each of their calls, while being diaconal, has unique characteristics.

Just what is diaconal ministry? Diaconal ministers began biblically with the first disciples. Their ministry continues to be rooted today in the ministry demonstrated by Jesus in John 13:1-20, the washing of the disciples' feet.

The section on diaconal ministry on the ELCA Web site (<http://www.elca.org/diaconalministry/>), tells us that diaconal ministers are consecrated for service in ministries at the intersection of church and world. Diaconal ministers work to seek wholeness in the world and to help the people of God to live out the Gospel. They are committed to alerting the church to the needs of the world.

Diaconal ministers seek to exemplify a life of Christ-like service, to seek out places of need in the world. They are ministers of the Word, committed to Christ, and called to be spokespersons for the Gospel.

Diaconal ministry develops in response to emerging needs and,



therefore, must be flexible enough to enable diaconal ministers to move into areas of service where the needs of persons and society are pressing the church for leadership and response.

The roles that diaconal ministers can and do offer are diverse. They serve pulpit supply and congregational functions when needed, much as ordained ministers can provide service to the world outside of the pulpit. In addition, diaconal ministers work in social service agencies, hospitals, and many other positions where the doorways exist between the church and society.

Linda's call in a congregation is developing into a collection of multiple part-time calls. Her roles cover Christian education, outreach ministries, and family ministries. Flexibility and diversity are a constant.

Serving is a companion to equipping others to serve. The time spent on equipping others with the skills to serve varies with the needs of the church or community. Any given week she can be a ministry facilitator, spiritual guide, pastoral visitor, teacher, local ministerium colleague and ministry planner, congregational worship leader, mission outreach networker, and coordinator with the congregational mission or ministry team.

So what is diaconal for Linda in all of this? It is the focus on ministry: In its every aspect, Linda's call is centered on a companion journey between congregation and community, identifying and serving those places about which our community and world might more easily forget. This ministry grows from Word and Sacrament and continues what is begun in the pulpit and at the altar, living out the communion at the altar in the sacredness of servant relationships in the community.

Kelly's role as a diaconal minister is a bit different. For Kelly, whose primary call is as a chaplain at the Good Shepherd Home, the call focuses on serving through ministering to patients and residents by meeting them where they are – in a hospital room or in their homes at Good Shepherd. Her call to word and service includes preaching on Sundays. Other duties include representing Good Shepherd within the community.

In her office at Good Shepherd is her basin and towel that she received at her consecration, a traditional gift as reflected by John 13. It is a constant reminder of her call to serve God and the people of Good Shepherd. Her guiding principle is "Jesus washed the feet of a few, so that I may wash the feet of many."

In addition to her ministry at Good Shepherd, Kelly works as a pastoral counselor at Concern and as a chaplain at Lehigh Valley Hospital. She lives out her life call in several locations, all with the same focus: a call to word and service. Whether she's knocking on a patient's hospital door or a client comes to see

her, she feels blessed in her call and continues to seek out those places where she can be a witness to God's love.

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