Strong Faith, Fervent Love: Advancing Deaconess Service in the Church

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s (LCMS) Deaconess Ministry encourages and supports deaconess formation and mercy work nationally and internationally. Deaconesses are Lutheran women who are theolog-ically trained to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through acts of mercy, spiritual care and teaching the Christian faith. They serve domestically and internationally — in congregations and institutions that exist to care for others — laboring in the Lord’s harvest fields and using their gifts to bless and serve others and to reach out to them with the healing balm of Christ’s saving Gospel.

DEACONESS GRACE RAO, director, LCMS Deaconess Ministry
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When Sandra Rhein forfeited her plans to pursue a master’s degree in church music to enter the deaconess program, she had no idea how God would work through her.

God used Rhein’s theological training and passion for music to spread the Gospel throughout Kenya. At the request of the Rev. Dr. Walter Obare, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, Rhein and a team of scholars and theologians helped bring about a “Lutheran hymnal with a Kenyan [African] touch.”

“Music combined with God’s Word,” said Rhein, “has the power to carry His Word deep into our souls, and bring comfort, strength and encouragement.”

“Theological training women share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through acts of mercy, spiritual care and by teaching the Christian faith. Like the women of old, they continue to work hard, laboring in the Lord’s harvest fields.

“We stand by Scripture and our Confessions,” said Deaconess Grace Rao, director of LCMS Deaconess Ministry. “Deaconess Ministry is centered on serving the church through education and mercy, and we point to the pastor for Word and Sacrament.”

Rao carries that message as she works to assist, advise, facilitate and coordinate deaconess training with LCMS partner churches around the world. Lutheran women in Kenya, Liberia, Latvia, Philippines, South Africa, India, Latin America, Russia and many other places receive theological and practical deaconess training through the efforts of our Deaconess Ministry office.

Mercy Care for All by Laura J. Seaman

Following the example of Peter’s mother-in-law, who rose to serve immediately after Jesus had healed her (Matt. 8:15), deaconesses serve out of gratitude for the mercy they have received through Christ’s saving work.

A deaconess is a servant of Christ and the Church. In whatever capacity is needed, a deaconess exemplifies the heart of mercy, caring for people in need and reaching out to them with God’s Word of life.

A History of Deaconess Ministry in the LCMS

1919 First LCMS deaconesses

1979 First LCMS deaconess training program established at what is today Concordia University Chicago

1989 Synod in convention adds Synod-trained deaconesses to roster of church workers

2001 Synod in convention approves deaconess training at LCMS seminaries

2002 Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, launches deaconess program

2003 Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, launches deaconess program

Deaconess Intern Caitlin Worden helps children sing during chapel at Castillo Fuerte in La Victoria, Peru.