



# Deaconess Ministry: Demonstrating the Compassion of Christ

BY DEACONESS GRACE RAO WITH MISSION EDITOR, CHERI FISH

The Greek root of the word deaconess (*diakonia*) means servant. Phoebe, named in Romans 16:1-2, was a helper to Paul and others. She often is considered the first deaconess.

“Two decades ago, I became a deaconess, and, over the years, people have asked me, “What is a deaconess?” Learning the answer to that question has changed my life in ways which I never imagined, and the Lord has blessed me with an understanding and knowledge to respond.

Thanks to the generosity of the LWML, the mission grant for the LCMS Deaconess Ministry program was awarded at their biennial convention in 2019. This mission grant provides educational and financial support to train women for this important ministry. It assists purchasing textbooks and provides resources for international students or students with financial restraints. It also helps fund deaconess internships in the United States and around the world.

The deaconess program is a rigorous one of theological studies and trainings that provide the foundation for the charitable life of those who serve on behalf of Christ and His church.

In the church today, deaconesses primarily serve in three settings: missions, both foreign and domestic; congregations; and institutions. These women guide others to the Word and Sacraments through:

- Demonstrating the compassion of Christ through acts of mercy.
- Teaching and witnessing the Christian faith, especially to women, youth and children.
- Assisting members in dealing with long-term crises such as disabilities, illness, unemployment, or poverty.
- Providing spiritual care for women with special needs, such as domestic violence, pregnancy, the loss of a child, or post-abortion grief.
- Administering the distribution of food and clothing to the poor.
- Serving as administrators or teachers within Lutheran organizations.

- Collaborating with nurses (especially parish nurses) in caring for the sick.
- Creating awareness in the congregation of the human care needs in both the church and the community.

A deaconess serves in a unique and complementary fashion with the pastor. Her service is guided by his ministry and leadership. She works alongside the pastor, assisting him to do those things that he alone is called to do in the Office of the Ministry. Together, their service extends the church’s reach into the lives of God’s people.

By God’s grace, the church can accomplish great things for those in need, especially those in need of the good news of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ our Lord. The LCMS Deaconess Ministry is blessed to be in partnership with the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League as we minister together to serve God and His people with gladness. *Q*