

The Role of Deaconess Through the Ages

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The Role of Deaconess through the Ages

The urge to serve Christ coupled with the tenderness of a woman's nature toward those who need help plus the "equality" given the woman to stand before her Christ by the common redemption has added to the church from earliest times devoted women workers. There is neither "bond nor free, male or female" (Gal, 3:28) when it comes to Christ's redemption; serving Him must also be done individually -- by male and female alike. If some women feel this calling to church service, whether it be before marriage, after marriage, or after widowhood, it is their freedom to so serve. It may be service as a Christian mother, as a Christian church secretary, as a Christian laywomen of any occupation, or, finally, and to us most important, as a full-time female church worker, a Deaconess. Do will not even I argue if one calling is higher than another, e.g. marriage and the usually celibate Deaconess, but we will simply consider the Deaconess from earliest times down to today as one phase of service to Christ which devoted women my perform.

In this consideration of the Deaconess, her multiple roles will become obvious. She is nurse, teacher, spiritual leader, domestic aid, social worker and secretary all at once in some phases of her history. Today also her role is many times a multiple role. With so many tasks, the deaconess obviously has filled an important place in the church. This paper will try to examine the role of Deaconess from Old Testament times to today with the aim in mind of better understanding this role and more appreciating its contribution to the church and society through the ages.

Purpose

"By love serve one another" (Gal, 5:13) and "Inasmuch as ye have done unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 40) are two passages ever foremost in the mind of the female deacon. The word itself, diakonia, means service, and service is the diaconate's purpose. Expressly stated, "The purpose of any diaconate must be and is: To serve the Lord Jesus by ministering to those who need help and care."

I. Old Testament Prophetesses

The Old Testament sheds light on the role of women in the church. In the creation story we learn that woman was created as a "...helps meet for him (men). She was created from a man's rib, on the same level with him, as a help and complement to him. She is not to rule him nor claim superiority, but to be a worker with him. She is to respect him, but she is not inferior to him, Woman was given a high place in God's order of creation, and though heathen nations do not generally respect women, Christians do. Though woman is physically and psychologically different, she is spiritually equal with man. Her desire to serve her God is then channeled in accord with her feminine, Christian nature.

Several Old Testament women are examples of this. More than once women are mentioned as leading the singing and dancing which were praises to God for some work He had wrought. Psalm 68 says, "The women that publish the tidings are a great host." Women also "ministered at the door of the tent of meeting." (Exodus 38:8.)

Rabbinical tradition shows seven prophetesses served the Hebrew people in special ways -- Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. As prophetesses they proclaimed the will of God as official representatives.

In addition to their official duty as Prophetess of proclaiming God's word, these Old Testament women also performed other services. Miriam led singing and dancing in praise to God for Israel's deliverance; Deborah

was a judge, religious counselor, and social arbitrator, and even led her people in a battle by which she won for them 40 years peace. Hannah - as the first to foretell Jesus' official name, i.e., Messiah, but she is best known as an ideal mother. Huldah interpreted the book of the Law to King Josiah and the high priest and influenced him to make a covenant with the Lord promising to keep God's commandments. All of these women were highly respected, something generally found throughout the history of women church workers, and they exercised also much influence over the social organization as religious women workers.

II. New Testament Deaconesses

With the coming of Christ came also mention of more women, for it was Christ who appreciated that women might also have a place in His Kingdom. His work, Paul, also, commended women church workers and mentions gratefully his "sisters in the faith" who had helped and ministered with him.

Just one of those writings by Paul it is that tells us of an official female church office, that of the female diaconate. In Romans 16:1ff. we read, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the Church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well." R.S.V. Phoebe was evidently sent to Rome with this epistle to the congregation there, and she is highly presented to these people of Rome by Paul. The word "diakonia" in Rom. 16: 1,2 is used in its technical sense as denoting an actual office (as in Tim. 3:2,8 with deacons), not in the more general usage as one who serves or ministers, Phoebe, then, is the first actual "deaconess" that we know about; this is supposed to be about the year 58 A.D. We note that her work as a "helper" or "Succourer" of many both spiritually and physically, no doubt ran much in the path of a social worker of today; of course the religious motivation made her office primarily one of the church, but it was felt also in the social order of things. Some of the N.T. women church workers, not all actual deaconesses, are Mary, the mother of Jesus who exemplifies perfect faith in Him; Anne, an O.T. prophetess who sees the baby Jesus in the temple; Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, who attend our Lord so devotedly and hear His words; Lydia, the first convert on European soil, a woman who was baptized and who sheltered many Christians in her home thereafter.

There is also Priscilla, the wife of Aquilla, converted from Judaism, who is mentioned in Acts 19:20 and 24 as helping to teach Apollos the way of God more perfectly, so she must have been well versed in God's Word herself. Paul calls her his "helper in Christ Jesus." (Romans 18:3).

Dorcas stressed practical and social Christianity by actually clothing the naked and doing all sorts of menial jobs to serve and help the poor and afflicted. Sewing circles named after her are properly named.

Many other women, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Euodias and Syntyche, and Lois and Eunice are commended for the various services to the church and Christ they did and for bring spiritual comfort and physical relief to many.

A Timothy 5, 3-16 refers to widows in such a manner as to make us wonder if they, too, did not have a particular place as women church workers; as part of the female diaconate, we reject them in this are although later on widows and virgins and deaconesses become generally amalgamated and referred to together, the actual reference sometimes being to one or the other or all three. One thing seems to be clear -- namely: that the full-time women church workers were free from any other ties that might burden their activities, e.g. virgins had no husbands and widows were older, free of husbands and children and therefore both could serve the church freely in this specialized way. That point, that marriage for a woman and a full-time church office do not mix, is generally maintained by all diaconates still today.

Now Testament deaconesses were parish deaconesses; they belonged to and served some particular congregation and lived alone just as a deaconess today might have an apartment. This is in contrast to the later female community living of the Middle Ages. us parish deaconesses they were of course especially to watch over the women and minister to them. They might also be expected to travel about with a message for the Christians just as Phoebe carried Paul's epistle to the Roman congregation.

In I Timothy 3:8 ff. Paul speaks of the duties of a deacon. Then in v. 11 he says, "The women likewise must be serious, no slanderer, but temperate, faithful in all things." R.S.V. Many believe this refers especially to Deaconesses. They were to be cultured and devoted woman.

St. Paul valued deaconesses as co-workers, but also sharply reprimands those women who were causing disturbances in the church. Such texts of reprimand are often quoted as "proof" against any women church workers, but this is only half of the story. For, as a whole, Paul highly recognizes women's work and approves of it; this is evidenced by the previous examples of N. T. Women taken from Pauline epistles.

III. Post-Apostolic Deaconesses

This era is the early "hey-day" of deaconesses, so to speak. Writers mention their work often and always with great respect and honor. The Apostolic Constitutions contain many references to deaconess work in the church of the day. As early as 100 A.D. when Trajan was emperor of Rome, Pliny who was ruling Bithynia mentions in a report to Trajan two women whom he questioned and who were evidently deaconesses by whom he was much impressed.

In the Apostolic Constitutions a distinction is made between deaconesses, widows and virgins; the chief difference was that the deaconess holds an actual church office. Further, we read that a deaconess shall be "a pure virgin" or "a widow once married, faithful and worthy." This is natural since family cares prevent full concentration on the job of Deaconess, end in the 2nd century A.D. this was no small job.

Duties

The deaconess work now consisted of administering to the poor and sick, doing parish work and teaching, or, more particularly, they were "... helpers to the sick and needy, laborers comforting the distressed and suffering - - such as the martyrs and confessors in prison to whom they could more easily gain access than the deacons; to instruct catechumens; to assist at the baptism of women (who were to be completely anointed with oil before immersion); to exercise a general over-sight over the female members of the church; and being hospitable -- some had used their homes for gatherings and for entertaining fellow-workers of Christ." They also acted as doorkeeper at the women's entrance into church and visited where a man-deacon cannot be sent...on account of unbelievers, i.e. to prevent scandal."

When we stop to remember that there were no hospitals, we can begin to imagine what a big job is implied even in the words saying that the deaconess "administered to the poor and sick." No provisions were made for the sick except by this one woman worker. Imagine even a small out-break of flu with only deaconesses to administer help and probably care for sick mother's families yet, too. This is a full time job. People's physical surroundings had to be set straight in order that Christ might better work in their hearts. In addition to this social work and nursing, the deaconess had the more strictly religious duties of teaching, doorkeeping, and assisting at baptisms, Here was no small task, and it required, as one author said, "A gifted individual with personal endowments of a religious kind" plus much courage to perform all these tasks,

Ordination

Realizing the importance of a Deaconesses' work and treating her as a full-time church worker, a sort of "ordination" service concluding with the "Laying on of Hands" was used to consecrate a woman to her work. Attributed to the Apostle Bartholomew, this "Laying on of Hands" reads as below:

"Touching the deaconess, I Bartholomew do thus ordain: O bishop, thou shalt lay on her thy hands, in the presence of the presbytery, of the deacon, and of the deaconesses, and thou shalt say:

"O everlasting God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of man and woman, who didst fill with Thy Spirit Mary and Deborah and Hannah and Hulda, who didst not disdain to cause Thine only-begotten Son to be born of a woman, who didst admit into the tabernacle of the testimony and into the temple of the woman guardian of Thy hilly gates: Thyself look down even now upon Thy servant now admitted into the diaconate, and give to her Thy Holy Spirit, and cleanse her from all pollution of flesh and spirit, that she may worthily fulfill Thy work thus entrusted to her, to Thy glory, and to Thy praise of Thy Christ, with whom to Thee be glory and worship, and to the Holy Spirit, forever and ever, Amen."

This "ordination" charges the deaconess with her responsibility, invokes upon her the help of the Holy Ghost, and gives her status in the order of church offices. The Deaconess ranked just after the Presbyter and Deacon. She was over the Institutes of Widows or Virgins where such groups appeared. A deaconess was "ordained" because her office is "more than a mere condition of life" like, e.g., virginity or widowhood. In 441 A.D. Thy Synod of Orange forbade this "ordination" but allowed consecration like any lay person might be consecrated.

In "ordination" only young women who had vowed not to marry and widows who had married only once were admitted. They had to be selected by the bishop yet. All this shows the awesome dignity connected with the office.

400 A.D.

In the congregation of Chrysostom in Constantinople around 400 A.D. there were 40 deaconesses. Chrysostom had a large church requiring many deaconesses, as it is he, more than any other historian of this time, who pays such a high tribute to his deaconess workers. He wrote many letters to them and about them. In one about them he says that all seemed to possess especially "... patience, immutable resolution, freedom of speech and lofty boldness" and "they put to shame your (the Christian's) enemies, and given a deadly wound to the devil, and leave comforted those that fight for the truth."

One of Chrysostom's deaconesses is especially mentioned by several authors. She is Olympias. Of great wealth and beauty, she married young only to be widowed at 18 years of age, The emperor tried to marry her to a friend of his, and when she refused, he confiscated her goods and wealth. She amazed him by thanking him for taking the burden off her hands and asked him to re-distribute her money to the poor and needy, He was, from all accounts, bowled over by Olympias' kindness and resolution. She became a deaconess and spent a rigorous life serving others in the light of Christ's love and teachings. Deaconesses such as she were perhaps so held in awe because of their difference from most women of the pagan city of self-indulgence and evil at that time. From all accounts, their deaconesses were serving in all sincerity and love for Christ even in this sinful background,

At any rate, the 40 deaconesses of Constantinople were actively engaged and thoroughly recognized in their work. These were stirring times in which they worked. Paganism was slowly being lost to a "fashionable

Christianity" not always good, either. However, some Christian women stood out, and one heathen, Libanius, referring to their beauty of character said, "Heavens, what women these Christians have!" Against this backdrop of evil, the witness of these women was more important than ever to the Christians of the day.

All during the 4th and 5th centuries, Greek fathers and church writers of the age, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Sozomen, refer to the female diaconate and the individual deaconesses always as of an honourable office and filled by persons of "rank, talent, and fortune." In passing we might comment that the wealth and rank of these women is surely in distinct contrast to later deaconesses who wore even ex-convicts.

A few accounts were given of "over-zealous" women who antagonized non-Christian people tactlessly and suffered for it, but most of the reports for this period are nothing but in high praise of the female diaconate.

The work of this 4th century is most like that of the 2nd century deaconess. She assisted at baptisms, nursed the sick due to lack of hospital facilities, reported cases of distress and distributed aid, taught women and children, and took bread and wine of the grape, or love feast, to women shut-ins. In the East her contact with women was very close, for here the female lived in much greater seclusion from men than did the Western women. Her work was of ample scope and she worked closely with the bishop in caring for the congregation.

But her high status did not last much longer.

Decline of the Diaconate

Because of the sacredness of the office, the deaconess could not marry. Evidently some infractions occurred, for marriage penalties were enacted. To prevent further instability, an age limit and testing program were set up for prospective deaconesses. The Council of Chalcedon set forth the following

"... the deaconess shall not be ordained before her 40th year, and this with the utmost deliberation; but if, receiving the imposition of hands, and remaining some time in the ministry, she gives herself over to marriage doing despite to the grace of God, let her be accursed, together with her paramour."

Further, she is to be beyond the age "of itself prone to sin" and is not to live with anyone whom she might properly call "beloved." Because they were not to live with "beloved" ones, two classes of deaconesses sprang up. 1) Those attached to churches and living alone and 2) those in convents or asceteries.

The latter type indicates to us two of the main reasons for the decline of the diaconate. First, nuns were becoming stronger and stronger in their convents, and secondly, many deaconesses had become ascetics in attempting to reject worldly corruptions and had thereby actually physically weakened themselves so that they simply could not perform their many duties. One writer said that when asceticism entered in, with it self righteousness came, and the deaconesses so weakened themselves that they were actually good for little else than assisting at the baptism of women. Some suffered from malnutrition, others were diseased, etc.

All church life underwent a change, and the diaconate fell into sad disuse. Nuns took over the servile tasks, and some deaconesses joined in communal living which was completely out of harmony with their work, which, being in the congregations, was necessarily an individual task.

By 1000 A.D. Deaconesses were not needed in at least two areas more, for men and women sat together in church so no women's doorkeeper was needed: also, baptism was no longer by immersion, so no woman was

needed to anoint the women's bodies; further, nuns were doing the nursing of the sick. What one Deaconess had previously done was now divided up into many jobs for many different people.

The Middle Ages were also unfavourable to the uncloistered deaconess. Deaconesses were active in their congregation and much prejudice was brought against them; they needed the protection of a convent, for that was the style of the day for single women. Monasticism had brought a new way of life to the female church worker.

One author attributes the decline of the diaconate almost wholly to the fact that deaconesses were allowed to preach, this due to the Montonist influence. He maintains that women church workers are not qualified for such a task; they are not and were not within their feminine realm of service to Christ as preachers, and thus they fell.

Generally, the decline of the diaconate until the 9th century, when it was practically unknown, is attributable to these three factors: 1) Montonist influence permitted deaconesses to preach and they were not suited for it. 2) Moral danger beset them and it was dangerous for a single woman to be as active as a parish deaconess must be. 3) Nuns in their monastic houses gave a large number of women's calling to benevolent work which replaced much of the Deaconess's former work.

Thus ended the flourishing diaconate of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries in the 9th century's oblivion. The deaconess had filled a demanding role, was highly respected, was a challenge to women who desired to serve Christ, and had served her church and community.

IV. The Reformation and Deaconesses

The female diaconate had given way under the sway of Monasticism, The deaconess was only in a few scattered congregations where she probably had no title nor accompanying dignity, for the individualism so necessary to each deaconess could not live under the trend toward "collective Diaconates" or nunneries. The order of the day was "whole choirs of perpetual virgins" who were maintained by churches, but they did absolutely nothing except remain virgins, The idea of social service being rendered by women was lost all together. Even the nuns did only menial tasks and lived mostly to write poems and think religious thoughts while treating themselves very ascetical and rigorously. This nunnery life was sincere and genuine yet cloistered and not at all socially helpful. This was the general pattern of women's service at the time of and proceeding the Reformation.

The two notable exceptions to this pattern were the Beguines and the Sisters of the Common Life. In 1148 Lambert de Begue founded the Beguines in protest to the convent life. The women were in all ways in opposition to nuns and nunneries; they took no vows, remained at home, served whenever they wanted, did not reject the company of men and did not especially vow poverty. The women held meetings for prayer, but mostly went about their business individually attending the sick, settling family disputes, and aiding the down-and-out with clothes they had sewed, food, etc. They were not a regular "ordained" part of the church's clergy. They prayed a great deal, and some feel, that while the nuns were living cloistered lives collectively, the Beguines lived cloistered lives individually and were not getting out as much as the Deaconesses of the 2nd century, e.g., and performing service, but praying at home too much. The Beguines flourished in the Netherlands in the 13th century but then slowly degenerated; they were viciously opposed by Papal bulls and monastic institutions. The Sisters of the Common Life, founded by Gerhard Groot in the Netherlands, did sewing, spinning, weaving, and care of the sick and of children. They were a small group.

Luther knew of the female diaconate and these above-mentioned groups, and so also did Calvin. They recognized them, but they did nothing to re-establish a diaconate. One diaconate was attempted in Wessel and

one in Amsterdam, but they failed because they were based on I Timothy 5:91 "Let not a widow be taken into the number under 3 score years old" and women over 60, it was found, could not render much service, other attempts at re-establishing the diaconate were made, but all failed. Leadership was lacking. Then Theodore Fliedner, a poor German Lutheran pastor, became interested, and the leadership was found in his person.

VI. Theodore Fliedner at Kaiserwerth - 19th Century

Pastor Theodore Fliedner of Kaiserwerth, Germany did the most of any single non for the Deaconess movement. He was pastor of a poor Lutheran church in an almost totally Catholic town, Kaiserwerth. While working with female prisoners about to be discharged, he was imbued with the idea of reviving the early Christian diaconate. Those female prisoners needed some work to prevent them from reverting to their old, criminal ways, and the church needed woman workers. Its demand was especially felt for religiously trained nurses, for the Napoleonic wars had created devastation and misery, and the wounded needed help, physically and spiritually. The German nobility and royalty backed Fliedner's aid, but did not provide organizational suggestions. Fliedner, therefore, toured the surrounding area, collected funds, hired one lady helper, and with the odds much against him, began instructing one female ex-convict in a summer house in his back yard. This phase of the diaconate was surely in the path of social welfare work. Fliedner was rehabilitating prisoners and the trained prisoners were in return rendering Christian service to the sick of their community.

Fliedner's program grew. Soon actual statutes outlining the Deaconess Program were drawn up, and in 1836, the pastor got some nurses to help him, purchased a "motherhouse," the biggest house in Kaiserwerth, used it as a hospital and institution for the instruction of Deaconess candidates, and began training women. Here his first student was a physician's daughter, Gertrude Reichardt.

Fliedner's wife played a very important part as Matron of the *Mutterhaus*. The girls who were in training prospered and grow in Christian love and devotion under Mrs. Fliedner's direction and care, This original motherhouse spread out over almost the entire village, and in its complete development, it had some 30 buildings including everything from a morgue to a chapel and from a recreation field to a caretaker's house. It was a huge establishment. Other houses also sprang up in Paris, Strasburg, Dresden, and Koeningsburg and in the East, in Jerusalem, Beyreut, Smyrna, Constantinople and in the West -- Pittsburgh.

In 1849 Fliedner gave up his pastorate that he might devote all his time to the deaconess cause. In 1864, the year of his death, some 1600 deaconesses had been trained at Kaiserwerth. One of these 1600 was Florence Nightingale, the famed nurse of the Crimean war. Her contribution to society along with the hundreds of other deaconess-nurses was very great. At first deaconesses worked only in hospitals and in the care of the sick, but in 1864, parish deaconesses were especially trained. Fliedner felt the parish deaconess was the most important. He was joined in this belief by another "great" in the Deaconess history, Wilhelm Loehe.

VII. Wilhelm Loehe

In the Bavarian village of Neuendettelsau, Wilhelm Loehe was a pastor. Interested in deaconess workers, he, too, set about to establish a training school. He was successful, and he himself instructed the students in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the diaconate--all except for arts and music which Loehe felt he could not teach adequately. His main tenet was complete self-sacrifice in Christ. This was evidently a sound basis, for the Deaconess order still remains today in Neuendettelsau. Loehe trained his girls for caring for the sick, teaching school, directing homes for wayward women, work in industrial areas and in congregational life. After 10 years of work, Loehe had trained 96 girls and had 55 more in the process.

In order to better picture this deaconess of Loehe's training, I have quoted below Loehe's estimate of what a parish deaconess should be, He considers this work, parish deaconess, of the highest calling to deaconesses. He says,

"In our opinion the deaconess should be the servant of the congregation, a sanctified presence among its women. What can we imagine more beautiful than to be at the side of the pastor and under his direction to care for the souls of women and advise them in spiritual things,"

Loehe further suggests the following steps to the calling of parish deaconess:

- a) First of all, become a maid, and learn everything about domestic affairs; from the meanest tasks up to the finest accomplishments Shame on the woman who does not reach the first step!
- b) Go for a time into a nursery and learn to take care of children. Shame on the deaconess who can be out to blush by a nurse-maid!
- c) Take a course in instruction in teaching little children, and do not rest until you know and can do all that is required of such a teacher. It is not so great a task.
- d) If you have the gift for it, take the full training as a school teacher; do not rest until you have done your part to put the girl's school into a woman's hands instead of leaving it to a male teacher.
- e) Learn how to manage the rescue home of a congregation, namely, the rescue home for women.
- f) Take a course of instruction in sick nursing, in the care of physical disease, and do not forget that your spiritual ministrations are even more important than that to the body.
- g) Be instructed in the care of those who are mentally unsound; but learn that for every mental disorder there is a simple remedy in the Word of God.
- h) After all this, become, if you can, a parish deaconess."

May I just say here that, after all that, the Deaconess would in our terms today be properly trained for filling the roles of house-wife, nurse maid, elementary school teacher, high school teacher for girls especially, director of an Old Folk's Home or a Home for Unwed Mothers, nurse, and mental institution worker. Loehe considered all these things necessary for a good Parish deaconess. Today each is in itself a full-time job. Deaconess work was detailed and demanding, that is sure. Loehe also united all the above-mentioned roles under the one all important aim of service to Christ, No one role was to be rendered alone and of itself, but all was subservient to the one big job of service to the Lord and building and maintaining His Kingdom. Another quote from Loehe illustrates this wish to serve God which he felt every deaconess must feel above all. He writes:

"What do I wish?	I wish to serve
Whom do I wish to serve?	The lord, in His poor and needy ones.
And what is my reward?	I do not serve either for regard or for thanks, but out of gratitude and love; my reward is that I may do this!
And if I perish in doing it?	"If I perish, I perish," said Queen Esther, who know not Him, for love of Whom I would perish; but He will not let me perish.

And if I grow old?

Still shall my heart keep fresh as a palm tree and the Lord shall satisfy me with grace and mercy. I go in peace and free from care."

Loeche also says deaconesses are to serve "giving yourself up freely and entirely to your vocation and serving your Lord with all your soul." He admonishes, "Woe to the deaconess who tries to serve the Lord half-way! She will be, all her life, a sad failure." This is a specialized, full-time calling -- deaconess work. Other Christians may certainly serve the Lord just as whole-heartedly, but deaconess work is distinctive in that the Lord's work is, always and fully, the day's task,

VII. Deaconess in England

From the continent, Deaconess work spread to England. Though it was begun by Elizabeth Fry, the best known English deaconess is Florence Nightingales with the prestige she gained during the Crimean war and her basic training from Kaiserwerth which she referred to as her spiritual alma mater, she reformed the English hospitals.

Hannah More, Elizabeth Fry and Sarah Martin are English deaconesses known for their work among prisoners and industrial workers who often got into much difficulty having moved to the city for jobs from a rural area and being exposed to evil city ways. Deaconess Training schools were set up in England especially by the Anglican church mostly due to the work of one Dean Howson, Their development was slow but steady. These anglican orders spread to America, especially Baltimore, where the deaconesses ran orphanages and a school for girls.

VIII. Recapitulation

Perhaps before we move to the Deaconess Program in America, we may pause to note the changes which have taken place in the role of Deaconess thus far. These are in comparison to the Apostolic deaconess. She is now a younger woman; she still visits the sick but no longer does as much of the physical nursing but more the spiritual ministering; she still does social welfare work by aiding poor families perhaps in the industrial area of a city; he still servos primarily the women; she teaches more than previously; she need not be wealthy and have money to spare as did Olympias of the Constantinople church, but she now acts as re-distributor of rich people's money and goods; she may or may not lead singing, direct a choir; she does work with and under the bishop or pastor; she does appreciate the arts; she is not preaching; she is singles Very important is the fact that the Deaconess is now especially and particularly trained for her job. Her motivations to serve are channeled and developed that she may appreciate all levels of life, neither scorning the poor nor ignoring the rich. Most important, however, is the one common bond which Deaconesses of all centuries maintain. They have all served, and they are all serving, because of their love for Christ. The expressions of this love may change through the ages with the felt needs of his people, but the underlying motivation and aim is still the same. The Deaconess is still, in this 19th century revival, an example to other Christians and apart of the church clergy to be respected, though not feared. She is still actively bettering her community and social order by her Christian ministerings.

IX. Deaconesses in America

Probably the first idea of a Deaconess in America came when Gov. Bradford's band from Amsterdam settled as Puritan pioneers on our New England coast. We may assume this since Gov. Bradford mentions a deaconess in his church in Amsterdam. He says they had "... one ancient widow for a deaconess and then he goes on to say that she was 60 years old, honored, and an ornament to the congregation. She kept the children in order during

the service by sitting on a platform over them with a long birch rod which she administered if necessary; she visited the sick and weak, especially among the women; she gathered help for the poor telling deacons of dire cases that they might aid them, "...and she was obeyed as a mother in Israel and an office of Christ. "Whether or not an official deaconess actually landed with the pilgrims, we do not know. But we do know that various churches slowly began to form female diaconates here in America.

Lutheran Deaconesses in America

Rev, W. A. Passavant, a Lutheran pastor, stimulated the deaconess program in America. He had observed the female diaconate in Europe and felt that the service they rendered was also necessary in the United States. Helped also by W. A. Muhlenberg, Passavant worked with Fliedner of Kaiserwerth and in 1849 established a motherhouse in Pittsburgh with two Kaiserwerth Deaconesses heading the program. In one year the first deaconess in America was consecrated.

Though many people complimented the fine work the deaconesses were doing, few volunteered their service, and the movement did not grow rapidly as it had in Europe. "In the first 35 years at Pittsburgh, 16 probationers entered, and many of those ...left shortly afterward to become married." This statement might well have been written also in 1952 -- not regarding the specific number, but regarding the marriage of prospective or student deaconesses; this problem still limits the program today somewhat. It is to be expected.

The Pittsburgh house required nursing of its deaconesses up to this time. Then Rev. Cordes was made rector there. His aim was that deaconesses should not be restricted to nursing. This was a new venture with new possibilities, and it added new impetus to the growth of the program. The Pittsburgh set-up outlines as follows:

1. Purely voluntary; join and remain without vows and retire of own accord; only conscience binds one.
2. Not an order, but an office as-servant of the church, restored from primitive diaconate.
3. Were to help suffering members of the church render mercy among sick and poor, ignorant and fatherless by establishing and conducting the necessary charitable institutions.
4. Motive: Love of Christ; no earthly reward; salaries limited.

The program grew and in 1893, a house was established in Baltimore; in 1884, the Mary Drexel Home and Motherhouse in Philadelphia; and in 1891, the Milwaukee Motherhouse in Wisconsin. In these homes, Lutheran deaconesses trained for teaching in kindergarten, nursing, and parish work in the congregation.

The system followed in the Milwaukee motherhouse as of 1949 is as follows:

1. Student is a candidate for 8 to 9 months,
2. Becomes probationer for 5 or so years.
3. Consecration to office of Deaconess by the imposition of hands.

She is then automatically a member of a Deaconess corporation. As such, she wears a dark, simple garb, she serves without salary since all her "salary" goes directly to the Motherhouse which then re-doles the money out in uniform subsistence amounts to all active deaconesses and keeps the rest to maintain the motherhouse and care for retired deaconesses there. This motherhouse is the spiritual, moral, and physical center of all its graduates' lives.

Episcopal Church Deaconesses

Within the Episcopal or Anglican church Woman church workers retained the two orders as also found in England -- namely: 1) sisterhoods, whose members took vows and did work of maintaining institutions and 2) deaconesses, who took no vows and worked in parishes, The sisterhoods were like nunneries, The first 3 years of convent life, the woman was free to change her mind and leave at any time; the 4th year she must vow to work for two years; and then if she stayed, the 5th year, she took her vow to life service.

In training their deaconesses the Episcopal church emphasized the intellectual background. The women are to be trained Biblically, culturally, and technically. They had a uniform of plain black, gray or blue with a necktie and bonnet.

Methodist Deaconesses

Founded in 1888, the deaconess movement of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the North purposed to train women for city, home and foreign missions, The growth was good. Duties were to make home calls, read from the Bible, pray with people, conduct gospel and prayer meetings, if ordained, to preach. She was expected to give personal testimony often in gospel meetings.

The program accepted girls from 23 to 40. After a 3 month's probation period, 3 years of training followed. The girl then is consecrated, works for 3 or more years to prove herself, and is then recommended to the office of Deaconess, and, if accepted, receives a license renewable each year. She takes no vows, but if still in the program at retirement, she receives a pension.

The Baptists have few deaconesses, and the Presbyterians have none. Interdenominational group started a motherhouse in Denver whose aim was care of the sick. They felt such philanthropic work should not have denominational hedges. But this program was short lived due mostly to the lack of "oneness" in the faith of its workers.

The German Reformed Church had one house in Cleveland. Congregationalists train some women in Chicago. Generally speaking, the Deaconess movement is much more widespread than one realizes.

Synodical Conference Deaconesses

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1911, the subject of deaconesses in the Synodical Conference was discussed by the Associated Lutheran Charities. This was the first mention of such a program in the Synodical Conference, Rev. F. W. Herzberger, having seen the opportunity for trained women in city missions in St. Louis, Mo., presented a paper urging a Deaconess program. The only results were that others became interested in this program -- especially Rev. Philipp Wambsganss of Fort Wayne whose mother, Elizabeth Hass Wambsganss had been a deaconess who had trained in one of Rev. Passavant's motherhouses and who was one of the first four Lutheran deaconesses to come to America.

In 1919 Revs Herzberger distributed a pamphlet on Deaconess work, and the Associated Lutheran Charities voted to organize a Lutheran Deaconess Association. Headquarters were in Fort Wayne with the Fort Wayne Lutheran Hospital Association Lutheran Hospital Association admitting students to train as deaconess-nurses. In addition to a regular nursing course, which was a must for these women, special religious instructions were given them. The first pupil, Miss Ina Kempff, daughter of a former missionary to India, was followed the next

year by four more students, one of whom, Miss Clara Dienst, is still actively serving and was campus nurse here at Valparaiso until 1947.

For 20 years, Fort Wayne was the center of the Synodical Conference Deaconess program. Rev. Wambsgans directed it the first 4 years; Rev. Bruno Poch of Grand Rapids, Michigan followed in 1993, He opened two more schools-- one in Hot Springs, So. Dak., and the other at the Bethesda Home, Watertown, Wis., neither of which trains deaconesses today. Poch placed 42 deaconesses in 8 years of his service.

Rev. Ho B. Kohlmeier, serving from 1923 to 1941, made a major change of program. Students were accepted only if they already were graduate nurses, teachers, social welfare workers, or some other especially trained person who might, with religious training, then become a deaconess.

In 1941 Rev. Arnold F. Krantz, who is still Superintendent today, changed the course to the length of two years plus six months consisting of training in the field and courses in Sociology and Psychology at the Extension Center of Indiana University in Fort Wayne. Then in 1943 the Lutheran Hospital at Fort Wayne could no longer spare the room to train and house deaconess students, so accepting Valpo's offer, the Deaconess Motherhouse and program moved to its present location, Valparaiso University.

At Valpo, from 1943 to 1945, part of the training was received by Deaconesses in regular Valpo classrooms and part from Supt. Krentz at the Deaconess Chapter house. At this time most of the girls were already trained nurses.

The last change up to the present day, 1952, came in 1946 when the program became a 4 year course leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree with a Religion Major and a second major, or/and minor, of the student's choice, This encouraged younger girls to take this program as it is not limited to nurses or other professionally trained people. The students live in two main houses with the overflow rooming in 6 neighboring homes in groups of from 2 6 girls per house; all are under the chapter house matron, Mrs. Sylvia Trautmann. There are presently 44 deaconess students at Valpo.

Most of the present students are training to be parish deaconesses although there are other fields -- city foreign missions, and institutional work -- also open. This academic year, 1951-1952, several new courses have been added to the Religion curriculum especially for the benefit of the deaconess religion majors. The first products of the 4 year plan are only now completing their first year in the field, but results seem to favor the broad background that 4 years of liberal arts affords the student. (Only this month, January, 1952, Rev, Krantz informed us that the A.L.C. decided also to follow this pattern of 4 year's training for their deaconesses.)

The Deaconess student is consecrated graduation and assigned a position by the placement board of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, Synodical Conference. The deaconess takes no vows and is free to withdraw permanently or temporarily at her will, with, of course, good reason. A pension plan is provided for retiring deaconesses.

The aim among Synodical Conference deaconesses is in harmony with all female diaconates through the ages -- namely, to serve Christ, our Saviour, by serving fellow man, even as Christ himself, through His love. Younger women of the 20th century have also felt this urge just as their ancient sisters and are thus found in the church's training program today.

X. Conclusion.

The history of the female diaconate gives us a deeper appreciation of this role of Deaconess. Examination shows us that the role has always be multiple; many abilities were and are expected in a Deaconess. While the general trend has been for division of labor, city missionaries, some institutional deaconesses, and some strictly parish workers, the individual deaconess must still strive for as broad a cultural, intellectual and technical training as she can acquire. With the ages her role has changed, but so also have the people she is serving. She must be prepared.

The Deaconess today does not meet any one set of "outward" requirements. Though she is usually single, she may be from 20 to 65 years, she may be rich or she may be poor. She may also be widowed and returned to her profession of Deaconess. She has received training however, though to various degrees; she may or may not be ordained. She may be a social-work-minded religious worker, and at times her work may also change emphasis so that it appears she is a religiously-minded social worker. If she may be so many things, the question arises what is she for sure?

Only one answer avails to that. From Olympias to Gertrude Reichardt to Ina Kempff, and from Constantinople to Kaiserwerth to Fort Wayne, Indiana, the deaconess has been a woman sensitive to suffering who loves her God and Saviour and wishes to serve Him by alleviating trouble and pain among her fellow man, members of His body. Today she is trained for this, so, in short, we may say that a Deaconess is a celibate, female, trained, consecrated, church worker who wishes to serve her Saviour by helping her fellow man, not only to physical well being, but more important, to spiritual health in God's kingdom.

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