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DEACONESS WORK

by

Lois Peters

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## DEACONESS WORK

Topic Sentence: In this research paper I shall attempt to describe how the Deaconess Organization was organized and how it grew, what training is necessary for a person to become a deaconess, and how several deaconesses have helped other people to overcome their troubles.

- I. Before I begin discussing the training or work of a deaconess I shall describe how this organization started and grew.
  - A. The deaconess movement had its beginning in Germany.
  - B. From Germany the deaconess movement spread to America.
  - C. Since 1911 the deaconess movement has been fostered in The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.
  
- II. The present day program of the Lutheran Deaconess Association in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod is very important.
  - A. Girls who prepare for deaconess work have a definite aim or purpose.
  - B. The Lutheran Deaconess Association has adopted certain entrance requirements.
  - C. The training of deaconesses has definite objectives.
  - D. The training prepares deaconesses for work in various fields.
    1. Deaconesses may train for service in foreign missions and home missions.
    2. Deaconesses may train for service in parish work.
    3. Deaconesses may train for service in hospitals.
    4. Deaconesses may train for service in other institutions.
  
- III. The most interesting part of the work of a deaconess are the experiences which the deaconess has in her work.
  - A. Deaconesses tell of experiences in parish work.
    1. Take the case of Mr. Wilson taken from the records of Deaconess Edith Holmes.
    2. This next case is a familiar one to every deaconess who works in a parish.

B. Deaconesses tell of experiences in home missions and foreign missions.

1. Right here at home there are deaconesses who have the privilege of seeing the results of their work.
  - a. Here is an experience in which the deaconess was privileged to see the results of her work.
  - b. This experience encouraged the deaconess even though this little colored girl could not work in the church.
  - c. This next case takes place in a congested area in our city.
2. Not only at home are deaconesses faced with problems, but deaconesses face problems in foreign missions.
  - a. Let's go to China and hear Deaconess Gertrude Simon tell one of her many experiences.
  - b. Here is the case of Too Houg Lee who couldn't wait to hear about the stories of Jesus.

C. Deaconesses tell of their experiences in hospitals.

1. Here is an interesting experience from the life of Deaconess Martha Theilmann who was assigned to one of our own Lutheran Hospitals.
2. My interview with Deaconess Rink was a very interesting one, and she told me some experiences which she had in her work as a deaconess.

D. Deaconesses tell of their experiences in other institutions.

1. Here is an example of how deaconesses can make sick children happy at Christmas time.
2. This is an incident which happens to one of our deaconesses in an old folks' home.
3. In the files of deaconess Martha Theilmann I found this experience which she will never forget.

Conclusion: In this research paper I have briefly described the organization of the deaconess movement, how deaconesses prepare for this work and how several deaconesses have succeeded in helping people in trouble.

## DEACONESS WORK

Since my childhood days I have always felt sorry for people who were in trouble, such as the poor and the sick. My father is a pastor and he receives calls for help any time of the day or night. It has often made me feel useless that I could not help; so I was determined that when I grew older I was going to help people who needed help through the Deaconess Organization supported within my church body, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. In this research paper I shall attempt to describe how the Deaconess Organization was organized and how it grew, what training is necessary for a person to become a deaconess, and how several deaconesses have helped other people to overcome their troubles.

Before we go into the work of a deaconess we should get a picture of how this wonderful organization came into being. The little town Kaiserwerth in Germany is the birthplace of the deaconess movement. A Lutheran, Pastor Theodore Fliedner, was its founder. It was in 1836 when Pastor Fliedner organized the first deaconess society in the house of Count Stolberg in Duesseldorf, Germany. Gertrude Reicherd was the first woman who promised to become a deaconess. In October, 1836, Pastor Fliedner opened the first motherhouse. The deaconess movement spread to Paris, Strassburg, Dresden, and Breslau. To the East the program spread to Jerusalem, Smyrna and Constantinople. To the West it came to our country, to the city of Pittsburgh.<sup>1</sup> Let's follow this movement in America.

The first attempt in America was made by a Lutheran, Pastor W. A. Passavant, who had met and talked with Pastor Fliedner in Europe. Pastor Fliedner in 1849 sent four deaconesses to help the movement in America. The deaconess movement grew and by 1889 there was a growing motherhouse in Philadelphia. Pastor Cordes, of Hanbury, who became rector of the Philadelphia motherhouse, said that this work could not be restricted to nurses; so in 1890 he started a school for deaconesses.<sup>2</sup> By this time the organization had spread to other churches.

The diaconate next in importance to that in the Lutheran Church is the diaconate of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The organization in this church was established in 1888 for the purpose of training woman for city missions, home missions and foreign missions. As early as 1855 the Protestant Episcopal Church began training deaconesses in Maryland. This church did much to train deaconesses for parish work. Two churches started their organization in the year 1901, the Congregational Church in Dover, Illinois and the United Brethren Church in Colorado Springs and Denver, Colorado. No history of these programs is available. The Baptist Church began deaconess work in 1895 in New York, a program which grew rapidly. The Presbyterian Church began to do deaconess work in 1887, but it died a quick death. There was another organization not supported by a church, called Inter-Denominational Homes, which was started in 1896. Its main purpose was to care for the sick.<sup>3</sup> This organization gradually ceased to exist.

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<sup>1</sup>M. James, "History of the Diaconate in Europe," p.2.

<sup>2</sup>M. James, "History of the Diaconate in America," p.3.

<sup>3</sup>M. Lois Jank, "The Diaconate in Other Churches in America," pp.1-6.

The deaconess program which is the most important to me I have not yet mentioned, namely that of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. In the next paragraph I shall discuss how this wonderful organization started and grew in this church body.

The Deaconess Organization in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod had its beginning forty-one years ago in 1911 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Pastor Herzberger of St. Louis, who was a pioneer worker in the Lutheran City Missions in St. Louis, brought the question before a number of Lutherans. There were no results for a while, but people began to think about deaconess work. Pastor Philipp Wambsganss supported Pastor Herzberger. People continued to talk about it, so that the idea would not be forgotten. In July, 1919, the Associated Lutheran Charities met in Fort Wayne again to discuss the Deaconess Organization. It was at this convention that the decision was reached to organize the Lutheran Deaconess Association with headquarters in Fort Wayne. A month later, August, 1919, the organization became known as the Lutheran Deaconess Association of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. The organization grew, so that by February 1, 1922, it had its own hospital.<sup>4</sup> In 1943 deaconess training was transferred to Valparaiso University. The Lutheran Deaconess Association retains its identity as an organization to sponsor and direct the deaconess program but utilizes the educational facilities of Valparaiso University. Since its organization a number of superintendents served the Association. The present superintendent is the Rev. Arnold F. Krentz, who lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Now that I have described the history of this great movement, the next question that arises is: What entrance requirements must a girl have or what training will she need to become a deaconess? A girl must ask herself a very important question before she even starts thinking about entering the work of a deaconess. She must ask herself: What is my aim or purpose in becoming a deaconess?

A deaconess wishes to be a hand-maid of Jesus Christ, to devote herself to the service of her Lord and Savior. To serve means to use one's gifts and strength, not for self, but for others. True service is rendered with a sincere heart. Deaconess work is service of mercy, kindness and charity. Works of mercy, of the right kind, belong to a lowly heart, a heart overflowing with love. A deaconess must be honest, full of the Holy Ghost and wiscom.<sup>5</sup>

What requirements must a girl who wants to become a deaconess meet? A girl must meet these requirements before she can enter Valparaiso University to become a deaconess: 1. She must not be over thirty-five years of age. 2. She must have graduated from a recognized high school. 3. She must have sound physical health. 4. She must have the sincere desire to serve Christ and the church. 5. She must have the recommendation of her pastor. 6. She does not have to be a nurse but it is helpful to the deaconess if she is also a trained nurse. The girl does not have to make a vow that she will stay unmarried, but she must serve

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<sup>4</sup> H. B. Kohlmeier, "History of the Lutheran Deaconess Association within the Synodical Conference of North America," 25th Anniversary of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, pp. 1-4, 7-15.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Mergner, The Deaconess and Her Work, pp. 145-151.

as a deaconess for three years. The church has set up three years as the length of service since the church pays part of her tuition.<sup>6</sup> What are the objectives of all this training? I can explain this point by quoting some Bible verses. In Galatians 2:20 we read: "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me." This expresses the one big objective in taking all of these courses. The student must have a deep and abiding faith in the Lord. That faith is fundamental in all church work. The next Bible verse is found in II Corinthians 5:15: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again." This expresses the second objective and that is to make that faith operate, so that the graduates give unselfish and consecrated service to Christ.<sup>7</sup>

All deaconesses get their training at Valparaiso, Indiana. The training prepares a deaconess for work in various fields. There are four different fields a deaconess can enter.

A deaconess may train for service in foreign missions or home missions. The Deaconess Organization has just recently entered the field of foreign missions. This is a very important and large field. Those deaconesses must teach in mission schools and to do this they must be well grounded in Scripture. This is a prerequisite for successful work. In order to integrate deaconess work with foreign mission work deaconesses receive some theological training, leading them into the Bible books, making them acquainted with the contents, the aim of the writer, and the historical background. Deaconesses who stay here in the United States have about the same training. They, too, must know the Bible well. They must take courses in Christian doctrine. They must be acquainted with the history of missions. Special emphasis is placed on the history of the Reformation and the history of the Lutheran Church in America.<sup>8</sup> This work is very important.

The field I think is the greatest is service in the parish. A deaconess who enters this field must certainly know her Bible and know how to use it. But besides all of this training in the history of the Lutheran Church, the deaconesses must have the gift of wisdom, and a warm and loving heart. The parish worker is the assistant to the pastor. It is not easy to describe in detail the work of a deaconess. Her task is to serve the poor, distressed, helpless and neglected found in homes of the members of the congregation. The parish worker has more jobs to keep her busy. She may help in the mission program of the congregation by canvassing, looking up children for Sunday school, be the counselor of the Walther League, and visit the sick. She is kept busy with all her tasks.

I have discussed foreign and home missions and parish work. In all of these the deaconesses have gone to the homes of these people. But there are some deaconesses who help and train for the service in hospitals.

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<sup>6</sup>"Entrance Requirements," Lutheran Deaconess Education, p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold Krentz, "Integration of the Lutheran Deaconess Movement within the Work of the Associated Charities," Fortieth Annual Convention--Associated Lutheran Charities, p. 32.

Deaconesses who enter the service in a hospital must have a good personality. To integrate the work with the work in the field, the training must help the deaconesses build a strong personality. To build this personality in them it is necessary to correct bad habits. Deaconesses in the hospitals may conduct devotion, teach Bible stories, play the organ for services in the chapel, and even baptize or confirm people.<sup>9</sup>

A hospital is usually thought of as a place where a sick person goes for a short while to get over a sickness. But there are places where people go and have to stay for years, or maybe for their whole life. These places are called institutions.

Deaconesses who enter this field must certainly love to be with people. I think it is more true in this field than in any of the other fields. In the institution our goal is to prepare the people to lead a happy Christian life. We must watch them so that they do not become homesick and lonely. In the institutions the deaconesses conduct religion classes as well as other studies. They prepare persons for baptism and confirmation. A special institution is an old folks' home. The deaconesses try to make the last days of old folks happy and contented. Whenever I think of an old folks' home I think of a poem written by Edgar A. Guest, which has caught the gist of the thinking of the aged who are shelved away in institutions. The poem is entitled "Sad Man."

The saddest man I ever knew  
Didn't have a task to do;  
Had enough for bed and board;  
All he needed he could afford,  
So he sat around all day  
While the time just dragged away.

Had to rest and wasn't tired;  
Having all that he required,  
Didn't need to save and plan  
Like the ordinary man  
For a winter coat and hat;  
He was done with all of that;

Heard the factory whistles blow,  
Saw to work his neighbors go;  
Watched the merchant sell his wares,  
But he had no business cares;  
Had no tasks the had to do,  
Had no purpose to pursue.

All day long he sat about,  
Lonely in the house or out;  
Friends were busy; all he knew  
Had to work the long day through;  
Muttered low from sun to sun;  
"Loafing isn't, any fun."

In the institutions the deaconesses try to make the older folks happy, but this is a very difficult job to do. The deaconesses have to help to keep the residents at peace with themselves and with each other. Old folks, confined to narrow rooms with insufficient outlets for their energies, easily become disgruntled, self-centered, and morbid. When many such unhappy people live together the stage is set for unpleasant scenes. Then gossip and bickering and discipline become an irritating problem.

With deaconesses working in all four of these fields and the expansion of the program, the organization must have a great number of deaconesses to take care of the many people who need their help. The experiences that a deaconess has in her work are most interesting. I shall relate some of these which deaconesses have experienced in each of the four fields.

Parish work is a very large field. There is an urgent need for parish workers as these two experiences will prove. Take the case of Mr. Wilson. Mr. Wilson was 74 years old and a very big problem to his children. The children wanted to put him in a home for the aged, but he would not go there. He said the food would be poor; the people would not pay attention to God's Word; he did not like men who drank beer. The children took their problem to the deaconess at the church which they attended. The deaconess went and talked to Mr. Wilson and told him what his duties as a parent were. The deaconess after visiting Mr. Wilson a number of times and many prayers to God helped Mr. Wilson to become a pleasant old man. Mr. Wilson is living with one of his daughters, helping her in whatever things he can. What would have happened to Mr. Wilson if there were no deaconess to help him in his troubles?

This next case is a familiar one to every deaconess who works in a parish. In one of the families of the congregation a mother is sick. The father must arise in the morning, prepare his own breakfast and hurry to work. The children are left at home dirty, hungry, doing anything they please. There is not enough money to hire a nurse. The tired father comes home to a very uncomfortable place. The deaconess comes to visit them. It is the deaconess' duty to help them. She makes the beds, cleans the rooms, washes the children, fixes the meals, and looks after the sick mother. The house becomes cheerful again. Soon the mother is well again and is able to continue her duties as a mother and housewife. This family will never forget what the deaconess did for them.<sup>11</sup>

There are deaconesses that help in the city mission, and also foreign missions. Right here at home deaconesses have the privilege of seeing the results of their work. City missions needs help, mainly because it has been neglected in the past. The work is more difficult. The many wonderful results experienced by deaconesses working with these people make the deaconesses feel that the blessings they are privileged to see as the result of their feeble efforts are greater than they even dared to hope for, as several of the following examples will show.

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<sup>10</sup> W. J. Wiltenburg, "Casework with the Aged," Associated Lutheran Charities--the the Fortieth Annual Convention, p. 73.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Wheeler, Deaconesses--Ancient and Modern, pp. 310-312



The case of Jimmy comes from the files of Deaconess Esther Haeger. Last fall she started giving instructions to Jimmy. He was well educated and willing to learn, but he had never studied the Bible or belonged to a church. The first few lessons with him were very difficult. He knew nothing of the Bible and, of course could not believe or understand the lessons she tried to explain to him. When she would ask him if he understood what she was explaining to him, he would answer very sadly: "I just can not understand it. It is all new to me. Maybe after a few more lessons it will begin to sink in." After several more lessons Jimmy could understand and read the Bible fairly well, but he had constant trouble with doubts that arose in his mind. Some of them were of such a nature that the deaconess had trouble to convince him that they were wrong. She even went to her co-workers for help. But finally the battle was won. Jimmy was baptized and confirmed. Now he spends hours every day reading his Bible, and he has done work among his room-mates and his family. Jimmy is going to die soon. You see, Jimmy has T.B. But Jimmy is facing death in a joyful way which would put many of us who think we have a strong faith to shame.<sup>12</sup>

Another story which illustrates the blessings God lays on the work of a deaconess is that of the little colored girl Rose. Rose had T.B., but she was getting better. She had been baptized when she was small, but she knew nothing of the Bible. She started taking lessons with her roommate. But being a very quiet girl, she never expressed herself in any way as to whether she did or did not believe. As far as anyone knew, she was getting along fine and had no symptoms of being in a critical stage. On a certain Friday morning she acted very unusual to her roommate. She sat up in bed and talked with her, asking her how she felt and telling her she hoped she would get better soon. Her roommate was very surprised since she had never talked to her in this way before and because she seemed so happy. Later in the afternoon when the deaconess gave them their lesson Rose told the deaconess her life story, repented of her sins, and told her she knew God had forgiven her and that she was saved. This surprised the deaconess as Rose was always timid and never spoke up. An hour after the deaconess left, Rose fell into a coma and passed away.<sup>13</sup> There is another experience I wish to relate. This story took place in a congested area of our city. The deaconess was seeking a mother of three children, who was deserted by the father. The mother told of her cares and troubles after the Bible class session at the mission last night. The deaconess turned in at the alley, for there is no front entrance. As she entered the back yard, she saw children playing in the dirt with a swarm of flies around them. She entered the house and climbed a rickety stairway. She inquired at the first doorway concerning the mother she was seeking. She was directed to the quarters of the unfortunate mother and found that she was living with her mother and step-father, and that there was only a single room for nine people from three families. The disorder, unwashed dishes, the garbage makes the room anything but inviting. The mother of her own accord requested that her children be placed into a Christian home. She had become a Christian through the work of the deaconess and she knew why.

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<sup>12</sup> Esther Haeger, "Deaconess Work in City Mission," Associated Lutheran Charities, Thirty-Sixth Annual Convention, p.129.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

well the dangers in which her children were at her mother's home because of adultery and alcoholism. Today these children are placed in the care of Christian foster parents.<sup>14</sup>

These are only three of the many experiences which deaconesses, who work in city missions, are privileged to enjoy. Not only are deaconesses faced with problems in home missions and city missions, but deaconesses also face problems in foreign missions. Let's take a little trip to China. Here in China we find Deaconess Gertrude Simon. This is the story Deaconess Simon tells.

I went over to Ichang, China, as a deaconess missionary. I organized prison visitations, adult Bible classes, a vacation Bible School, Bible Institutes, and a Christian day school. Then there came a crisis. I have heard several times the Communists were coming but they always quieted down. But one day they did come. I had to flee.<sup>15</sup>

A tragic chapter has been written in Chinese mission history. Communists came; Missionary Simon went out, but her work goes on. This is another incident in which Communists pushed our Lutheran deaconess out. But before we leave China I would like to tell the story about Too Houng Lee, who could not wait to hear about the stories of Jesus.

When our deaconess came to Too Houng Lee's town, she was welcomed with open arms. Too Houng Lee wanted to hear about Jesus. The first day of school Too Houng Lee arrived before all the children. He listened to every word the deaconess said. Too Houng Lee would say, "I love to hear the stories of Jesus because I want to become a Christian." Shortly after this the town held a fair. Too Houng Lee was drowned. But the deaconess was very happy that she had led Too Houng Lee to his Savior before he died.<sup>16</sup> These two experiences show that foreign missions are very important to the people across the sea.

Now we shall consider the activities of a deaconess in a hospital. Deaconesses who work in our Lutheran Hospitals must know how to handle every situation. Here is an interesting experience from the life of Deaconess Martha Theilmann who was assigned to a Lutheran Hospital. This incident took place in the childrens ward. A little sick boy who had come from a broken home was speaking of his parents and said, "My father was a drunkard, and was put in jail, and my mother used to drink worse than my father. My mother ran away and we don't know where she is." The deaconess arranged to place the little boy in a good Christian foster home.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> H. K. Platzer, "Developing the Gospel Missions," Associated Lutheran Charities--Thirty-ninth Annual Convention, p.86.

<sup>15</sup> Gertrude Simon, "The Communists Arrive--Miss Gertrude Simon Flees," The Lutheran Deaconess, XXVI, No. 3 (October, 1949) 3.

<sup>16</sup> Martha Boss, "Too Houng Lee--The Savior," The Lutheran Deaconess, XXVIII, No. 1 (January, 1951) 5.

<sup>17</sup> Martha Theilmann, "Interesting Chapters In My Deaconate," The Lutheran Deaconess, XXIX, No. 1 (January, 1952) 3.

a deaconess must have an understanding heart, patience and wisdom to lead other people to Jesus. These next experiences stress this point very well. I was very thrilled to have the opportunity to talk to one of our own Lutheran deaconesses. I talked to Deaconess Rink, who works at State Hospital, Koch Hospital, and sometimes at City Missions. At Koch Hospital she calls on the women patients and sees if they have any religious training. If not, she invites them to the Lutheran services. Deaconess Rink told me a little experience where she gained the whole family through one daughter. The daughter was very sick; her mother was at home, an invalid. The girl came to know Jesus as her Savior and asked the deaconess to see her mother at home. The deaconess did so, and the mother and her son became members of the Lutheran Church. Another experience is about a dancer who became sick. She had no religious training. She did read the Bible once in a great while. Her roommate was a Christian and was going to die soon. Her roommate was not afraid to die. When she died it touched the former dancer very much and she became a member of our church. She is now a very faithful member in one of our Lutheran churches.

A place of which people at times make fun is the State Hospital on Arsenal Street. People often say the patients in this hospital are crazy. Would you call them crazy before God? These people who are in the State Hospital are mentally ill and need very close attention.

Deaconess Rink told me of the following experience at State Hospital. A girl in this hospital was trying to commit suicide. She did not have any friends. She thought there was nothing to live for, so she thought the only way out was to kill herself. But then our deaconess came in and spoke to her. She told her the stories about Jesus and how He died on the cross for her sins. Through these stories the girl found comfort in her Savior and learned that she was wrong in trying to kill herself. The girl is getting better now and she is praying that she can go out into the world and help bring the Word of God to others.

We shall now follow a deaconess into another institution. People who are in an institution at Christmas time are often very sad. Let's visit Immanuel Deaconess Institute to see how Christmas is celebrated there. As we entered the deaconesses were making fruit cake, cookies, decorating a tree, and wrapping gifts. The first floor had the biggest tree and under the tree were big, medium, and small packages. On the afternoon before Christmas Eve, patients in wheel chairs, children on crutches and others walking as best as they could, came to gather around the tree on the first floor. The children sang, ate and received presents. Everyone was happy. But good things always have an end, so the children, tired but happy had to be taken back to their rooms and put to bed.<sup>18</sup>

The next experience happened to one of our deaconesses in an old folks' home. Mr. Smith had lived a long and happy life with his wife. They owned their own home. Mr. Smith was a gardener and he loved flowers. The time came when Mrs. Smith could not get around so well, so they sold their home and went to live in the home for the aged. Mr. Smith was not happy, especially in the spring when he saw the flowers being taken care of. Mrs. Smith went and told the deaconess and she found a job as gardener for Mr.

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<sup>18</sup> Ebba Leaf, "In Wheel Chair on Christmas Eve," The Deaconess Banner, XLIX, No. 9 (December, 1950), 3.

Smith and he became a very happy man once more.<sup>19</sup>

The last experience which I shall relate took place in the Lutheran Institute for the Deaf. It was taken from the files of Deaconess Martha Theilman. She is telling the story.

I was given a few lessons in the sign language so I could understand the deaf children. At first it was very hard for me to understand them and for them to understand me. But I grew to love these children, as if they were my own children. I got a great thrill out of teaching the children about sin, grace, God, heaven, hell and Jesus as their Savior from sin. But with God's help I conquered it and many of the girls are helping other deaf people learn about Jesus as their Savior.<sup>20</sup>

As Christians we should do all in our power to help these people.

It is well for us not to take our health and all our pleasant living just for granted, but remember that God gave them to us. It is also important to think about all the people who do not enjoy the pleasures most of us experience.

As my concluding thought I should like to stress how necessary it is that there be more Lutheran deaconesses, so our church can bring needed help to more needy people. There are many people whom the Christians must tell about Jesus and how they can be saved.

In this research paper I have briefly described the organization of the deaconess movement, how deaconesses prepare for this work and how several deaconesses have succeeded in helping people in trouble.

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<sup>19</sup> W. J. Wiltenburg, op. cit., p. 70

<sup>20</sup> Martha Theilman, op. cit., p. 3

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