



# LDA TODAY

FALL 2010

## AN INSTRUMENT OF CHRIST'S LOVE

By Deaconess Diana Iltzsche

Deaconess Dawn Riske, – singer, pianist, organist, choir director – spent her summer vacation recording a new Deaconess Choir album, *Songs of Justice and Peace*. But when she went to work this fall she was Ms. Riske, facing the challenges of teaching pre-K through sixth grade music in St. Louis, Missouri's inner-city.

Here Dawn finds herself serving God in the most "on the edge ministry" of her deaconess career. Walbridge Elementary's neighborhood ranks first in homelessness and AIDS cases, and has the city's third highest crime rate. Among mostly economically deprived African American children – many robbed of social, emotional and interpersonal development – her work is far greater than simply teaching music. It is about enabling students to develop their own gifts and inner resources to become healthier, productive individuals. She claims that even the most difficult child can work his or her way into her heart.

One who did is James. Severely autistic, James rarely communicated except to scream when he was stressed. Then came the day she was teaching the German folk song, "Ach, du lieber Augustine." Dawn asked James to dance, and he responded – swaying in time to the music. To her surprise, the next week when the class sang the song, James began singing the words, too. Subsequently, he was either given a rhythm instrument or asked to move to the music.

James had found a tool for expressing himself; God's gift of music had become a way to communicate and interact with his peers.

Dawn is aware that, unlike this breakthrough with James, she may not see results of her efforts with many of her students. Yet, as one entrusted with these children's lives, she seeks to let God's love shine through the music she brings, to let it speak to the children about what it means to be fully human, to care for ones self and others. Whether it is a Spiritual that teaches faith's history or a song that teaches a good-life lesson, Dawn allows music to speak to her students' lives.

Deaconess Dawn says that she finds her strength by "soaking in prayer" her concerns for her students and the challenges they present. She may go to her workplace incognito as Ms. Riske, music teacher, but through her sense that music can bring *justice and peace*, she brings Jesus' love to her students, "letting Jesus' light shine in the darkness."





## Executive Director's Corner



### CHEMIST FINDS NEW CALLING...

*"Girl Chemist Finds New Calling: Will Be a Lutheran Deaconess"* headlined a 1955 New York Post. Hertha Fischer, a Hunter College graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree, worked for three years as a chemist. Evenings and weekends, Hertha volunteered in a wide variety of church ministries. Soon, she began to wonder if her true calling was as a chemist or deaconess. This led the Post to say, "A Bronx chemist who found her calling in the church will be consecrated as a Lutheran Deaconess...."

Fifty-five years later, Hertha is still a deaconess. Retired, she assists her pastor, John Holliday, at Prince of Peace, Old Tappan, NJ. He says, "Hertha is an inspiration to folks

at Prince of Peace. Her energy, vision and enthusiasm for Jesus' Kingdom continue to amaze me. The title 'retired deaconess' or 'retired disciple' would never be applied to Hertha! When a person has the high privilege of working with Hertha, that person experiences a powerful expression of God's love!"

*Investigator Finds New Calling....* Karen Pitkin's career was as an arson and fire investigator. An active member of her congregation, she also served on a Lutheran Campus Ministry board. Karen had long felt God's tug at her heart and found her way to the LDA. Since 1992 Karen has been consecrated, and her call is to be the chaplain at Breeze Park Lutheran Senior Services.

*Nurse Finds New Calling....* Beth Olejniczak is in the application process for our spring class. Currently the Director of the Virtual Nursing Learning Center at Valparaiso University's College of Nursing, Beth is connected to the International Parish Nurse Resource Center. Several years ago, she took the basic parish nurse course and started a health ministry program at her church. Now, Beth teaches the university parish nurse preparation course. She says, "Teaching, preaching and healing is the basis for both deaconesses and parish nurses, and I've felt the tug at my heart strings to further my call to serve God in my vocation by becoming a deaconess."

Have you been waiting to answer God's call? Are you in business, an engineer, a mom, a student or a farmer? Do you think that you do something that isn't what a deaconess would do? Listen! God might be calling you to something new!

Deaconess Lisa S. Polito

Executive Director

# SERVANTS AMONG US

Ask a deaconess, “Who inspires your servanthood?” and get these responses:

Anna has a ministry of presence and hospitality. In her quiet, unassuming manner, Anna provides leadership through the choir, organ, quilting, Women’s Group...

Barb is the organizer and force behind the volunteers that cook and serve at The Caring Place...

You’ll find Donna helping at the Habitat Restore, at the neighborhood community meal, and at VBS...

Martha is a retired nurse who volunteers at hospice. In her mid-eighties, she regularly visits members of the congregation who live in care centers...

Nancy, a pediatric physical therapist, travels to Guatemala with Hearts in Motion. She has inspired others to join her.

**W**hile some are set apart by the church as diaconal leaders, all baptized persons receive *diakonia* – the call to servant ministry. The LDA’s Laity Services Committee recognizes those every-day Christians who are “among you as one who serves.” *Luke 22:28*. Their care for people in need makes them partners with deaconesses all over the world.

**H**ow have you and your friends answered your baptismal call? Our goal is to find 91 servants – one for each year the LDA has been around. Send the story of someone in your congregation who has a diaconal heart to [diane.marten@valpo.edu](mailto:diane.marten@valpo.edu). We’ll take care of the recognition!



**We’re looking for servant leaders who want to put their faith in action.**

Ministry encompasses serving a variety of needs. A deaconess serves others with intentionality in her job, represents the church in the world, and journeys together as part of a praying community.

**Grow with us!**

Explore the deaconess training program at [www.thelda.org](http://www.thelda.org). Distance-learning and graduate programs are available! Next application deadline is April 1, 2011.



## Everyday Servants

### TELLING THE STORY

*Deaconess Claire Schoepp*

“The church has taken its image of Jesus primarily from the Gospels, from the stories gathered, told, written and read .... that give shape and credibility to the Christian life, to our *diakonia*.” – the voice of Louise Williams keynote speaker for the 2011 VU Guild’s Christian Women’s Conference.

In teaching diaconal theology, Louise explores five images which capture diaconal ministries. Perhaps the one most associated with LDA is that of footwashing, symbolized by the basin and towel. She says, “Jesus, teacher and master, took up basin and towel and became a slave.” As Christians, we share Christ’s servant identity in baptism. That Jesus model for action is diaconal servant-hood: showing compassion and embracing the outcasts on society’s fringes – the lost and the least.

It is also part of the story we share in word and action in another of the five images Louise explores: *diaconal storytelling*. Rooted both in scripture and the early church, it was the liturgical practice for the deacon to read the Gospel.

“It follows that the diaconal tradition is one of opening up the Jesus story and the stories Jesus told,” Louise says, adding, “It is not only by telling the Jesus story, but by listening to and helping others tell their own stories, that deaconesses and deacons have come to help people make their own connection with Christ.”

Louise recognized that important dimension to our *diaconal storytelling* role as a parish worker in urban Kansas City. In her congregation, retired women began teaching young community women sewing. While being taught a valuable skill, she noticed something perhaps even more important. As each woman shared her story and listened to others, bridges were built across perceived boundaries and Jesus’ love was in action.

As past president of DIAKONIA, Louise has experienced first hand deaconesses and deacons storytelling ministries around the globe building bridges by listening, sharing and acting in Christ’s

love. She looks forward to challenging our storytelling ministry imaginations this coming April. A story teller in her father’s Ozark Mountain oral tradition, she reminds us that listening to and sharing stories of God’s work are “ways of witnessing to Jesus Christ,” and “almost every time you encounter gospel, there’s something new to be discovered.”



**Learn more about the diaconal storytelling image from Deaconess Louise Williams at the Christian Women’s Conference in April.**

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Consecration of Carmen Colon-  
Brown November 14, 2010

Consecration of Angela Logan  
November 27, 2010

Advent Vespers Party  
December 10, 2010

Church Commemoration of J.K. Wil-  
helm Lohe (LCMS), January 2, 2011

Church Commemoration of Dorcas,  
Lydia, and Phoebe (ELCA),  
January 27, 2011

Student Seminar, Valparaiso, IN  
February 23 – March 4, 2011

Student Applications for August  
Seminar due April 1, 2011

Phonathon April 7 – 9, 2011

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