



Jeff said: “You probably don’t remember....”

By Deaconess Chaplain Lorinda Schwarz and Jeff

As a chaplain for the Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC), my responsibilities include being with the incarcerated as they experience crisis. Many times this means being a ministry of presence with individuals, families, or groups. Jeff was a coworker in the ODOC Religious Services unit, a gentle person whom I liked very much. He was clerical support staff for our unit and often did research for us.



Chaplains know that to be of spiritual and emotional support often means quietly moving into rippling ponds of crisis. Even though he worked several hundred miles from our facility, I found him to be very supportive of my chaplaincy role.

After several years of being at meetings together, sharing lunches, E-mails and phone conversations, one day he told me that he had never thanked me for something that I had done years earlier. He felt he needed to do that. I couldn’t imagine what he was talking about. “You probably don’t even remember that day, but I do,” he said as

he told me that he had been incarcerated a few years earlier at the facility where I worked. Because of the stigma of being an ex-offender now working in the Department of Corrections he’d waited five years and wanted to say “Thank you.”

Jeff said that I had “been there” for him during a tough time in his life and my presence had made a very real difference. He had never dealt with a Chaplain before but he’d hoped that I could help him in his situation. I was sorry; he was right, I hadn’t remembered. Knowing I dealt with many individuals, he hadn’t expected me to, yet, he’d never forgotten our conversation or how I cared at a time when he was unsure that anyone would care.

As chaplains we move in and out of lives that are in crisis, pain, turmoil, or simply quiet suffering. We seek to provide a sense of stability, grounding and hope; yet often we never encounter the individuals again – or know if we’ve had any impact. We trust God to use us to touch lives and meet the needs of others. Then, once in a while, God blesses us with a Jeff who – even though we don’t remember – lets us know how God worked through us doing what we are called to do daily.

A photograph of a sunset behind a barbed wire fence. The sun is a bright, glowing orb on the left side, partially obscured by a strand of barbed wire. The sky is a mix of orange and yellow. The barbed wire fence runs horizontally across the frame, with several strands visible. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

“You were just what was needed that day; humane, compassionate, and caring. You were simply who you are.”

Photo “Imprisoned Sunset” Courtesy of Paul Cory



Executive Director's Corner

An Unconventional Ministry

“Hello, I’m calling on behalf of the Lutheran Deaconess Association.” Every spring for over 20 years, dozens of volunteers have flooded phone lines over several days, calling friends of the LDA. First time callers and people who have been calling annually since the call program began, they are active and retired professors, business people and LDA board members, deaconess and VU students who worship at the Deaconess Center on Wednesdays.



Deaconess Marla enjoys building relationships with donors during the Phonathon.

And, of course, there are deaconesses. Marla, who probably speaks for others, says “I was nervous and not sure what to say to strangers. But I’ve discovered that these LDA supporters are not strangers. They are brothers and sisters in Christ who are passionate about sharing Jesus’ love through serving. The phone calls help to connect me to some of the people who made it possible for me to become a deaconess--one of the greatest blessings in my life.”

Whether first time or veteran volunteer callers, most are nervous about calling you at first. But they are encouraged and enthusiastic about supporting our ministry in this way. Volunteering for one or two nights, they chat with people across the US and Canada. They hear your joys and sorrows, reminisce about your encounters with deaconesses and, when you are able to share,

learn about the early ministry of deaconesses. They take careful note of your prayer requests, praying for you and sharing those with the LDA staff so we can pray as well, and they love to hear about how a deaconess has touched your life.

The LDA Phonathon is our biggest fund raiser of the year, generating nearly one-third of our annual donations from individuals. But, it is more than just someone calling to ask you for money. Our callers are grateful for your friendly voice. We know that these recent years have seen so many people struggling financially. Whether you are able to give \$5 or \$5,000, we are grateful for your faithful support as we carry out this ministry of serving God’s people together. Please say yes when we call!

Deaconess Lisa Polito

Executive Director

A Diaconal Perspective Legacy

From their earliest days at Valpo, Roger and Jane Geske remember being around deaconesses. Many of their friends were deaconess students and, as a student, Roger even mowed the deaconess hall lawn. Therefore, it wasn't a surprise that their daughter, Kris, entered the deaconess program in the '80s and that the Itasca, Illinois, couple kept their diaconal perspective when it came time to do their estate planning.

Along with many Valparaiso University alums, Roger and Jane have a heart for service. Jane served as the director of parish nursing at the Lutheran Home before retirement. A Stephen Minister today, she also keeps busy as volunteer parish nurse for Itasca's Lutheran Church of St. Luke. Servanthood was also a theme in Roger's career which included terms as municipal treasurer and village trustee. Having served on St. Luke's stewardship committee, he points out that the Geskes have always been proportional givers. It was important to them that they continue this practice in their legacy planning.

Before making the decision to name the Lutheran Deaconess Association as a beneficiary of their Trust, they talked it over with their four children who, also raised to be proportional givers, understood their decision. Each of them had also selected servant professions -- Susan as a medical missionary, Karen a health educator and Stephen, a pastor at Messiah Lutheran in Chicago, the ordained ministry.

The Geskes feel strongly that there is a need for deaconess ministry. Roger, now retired and recovered from a mild stroke, said that it was as important for him and Jane to continue doing what they have done their "entire lives" -- sharing "the Lord's blessings." For them, this gift celebrates the versatility and variety of talents and perspectives deaconesses bring to their work. A charitable bequest such as the one the Geske's made is an easy and significant way to provide a gift to the Lutheran Deaconess Association. A bequest allows you to provide an unrestricted gift, fund your favorite program or establish a scholarship fund. Notifying the LDA about your intentions allows us to better plan for the future of deaconess ministry and to thank you!

For more information about charitable estate gifts to support the LDA's deaconess ministry, visit www.thelda.org/support/lastingdifference.php or call Christi Thieme at 219-464-6925.



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Everyday Servants

Editors Note: While some are set apart by the church as diaconal leaders, all baptized persons receive diakonia – the call to service.

The LDA aims to affirm, support and extend the diaconal ministry of all God's people. This column highlights stories of the many congregations taking that diaconal call to heart. While they are served by LDA deaconesses, the stories aren't about them, but about how the Holy Spirit can guide congregations to respond to that baptismal call.

"... And I was in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25:36

Those words of "need and response" follow other very familiar ones about feeding the hungry, providing a drink to the thirsty, and clothing those in need. In truth, we've probably all done a very good job on the food and clothes part of this passage. Pantry shelves are visible in most congregations and clothing drives abound in our communities. Eating and being clothed is such an intrinsic part of our daily life that we immediately feel those needs and we give.

If you're a parent, you may especially feel connected to this scripture because you spend a great deal of time, energy and money on feeding and clothing your children. And most likely your heart makes a quick connection to other people – especially children – as you think about this teaching. (My child needs food and clothing; of course I want to help other children.)

It is probably unlikely that you make a connection between your child and the prison

visitation part. Unless you're Carol. After very troubling years where love, counseling, and even prayer seemed to fall short, she found herself in that unimaginable place: to be with her son, she needed to visit him in prison.

No parent is prepared for that gut-wrenching reality. So Carol did the only thing she could: she showed more love, sought more counseling and said even more prayers – before, during and after all of those prison visits. And gradually things changed. In many ways.

Yes, Carol's son served his time. This young man is very aware and grateful for all his mom has done and has successfully re-entered society. But Carol has also experienced a profound change. Her heart has flooded over with compassion for other families in similar situations. With help from several others, Carol founded the Prison Ministry at Ascension. It strives to help families – both in and beyond our congregation – move from the emotions of sadness, disappointment, embarrassment and grief to the healing that comes with support, presence, love and prayer.

Letter writing, visitation and friendships are all a part of this ministry that has now become a "Small Group Ministry" in our congregation. We have also named it as a growing outreach program in Ascension's 2020 Vision. Behind this ministry is a mother's heart – a diaconal heart – that, in the midst of enormous difficulties, continued to serve through the ministry of mothering. Mothering that fed and clothed her child, and then visited him in prison.

Deaconess Jan Janzow



Bibles and other books for the library are just a small part of the care provided to prisoners.

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Calendar of Events

Phonathon April 29 – May 1, 2010

Student Application Deadline
May 1, 2010

Consecration of Claire Schoepp
June 6, 2010

Consecration of Heather Wickstrom
June 19, 2010

Deaconess Annual Meeting,
Cleveland, OH
July 29 – August 2, 2010

Student Seminar, Valparaiso, IN
August 11 – 18, 2010

Church Commemoration of
Theodore Fliedner, (ELCA)
October 4, 2010

Church Commemoration of Dorcas,
Lydia, and Phoebe, (LCMS)
October 25, 2010

Lutheran Deaconess Association

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