



Summer/Fall 2023

Lisa Polito to Step Aside

Search Begins for New Executive Director

Deaconess Lisa Polito, longtime Executive Director of the LDA, announced in July her plans to step aside at the end of 2024.

Dear Beloved Friends of the LDA,

It's time. I have loved nearly every day of my 22 years at the LDA! After leading this organization as Executive Director since 2008, it's time for me to step aside and for someone new to love and serve the LDA. December 31, 2024, will be my last day.

A search team named by the Personnel Committee of the LDA Board is hard at work to find the next Executive Director. I'm excited about the new person who will lead the LDA and grow this ministry through faithful, generous people like you!

I treasure our friendship and partnership formed through our shared love of the LDA's mission. And I'm still excited about serving these next 14 months and assisting in a smooth transition.

I know God will continue to bless the LDA. Thank you for your love and support, and your prayers for the work of the search team. The search team will continue to share information on the nomination and application process on the LDA's website, www.theLDA.org. If you have questions, please let me know.

Faith and Service in Christ,



Deaconess Lisa Polito, Executive Director of the LDA, has led the organization for more than 15 years.

**“There is a time for everything, and a season
for every activity under the heavens.”**

Ecclesiastes 3:1



Executive Director's Corner

Celebrating 80 Years of Partnership with Valparaiso University!

Dear friends,

Eighty years ago, a partnership was born, and it continues to bear fruit today.

It was at the invitation of Valparaiso University President Rev. Dr. O.P. Kretzmann that the LDA training school, then located in Fort Wayne, Indiana, found a home at Valpo in 1943. Deaconess Hall was built and dedicated 15 years later. In 1969 the LDA moved its offices from Fort Wayne to Valparaiso.

The agreement between Valparaiso University and the LDA called for the deaconess training school to remain a separate entity and retain its unique identity. The University would retain its autonomy in accepting deaconess applicants as students. The LDA would have the authority to accept students in the deaconess program. The University charged LDA students half tuition, the LDA Superintendent was given faculty status, and the LDA made an annual contribution toward the budget of the University's Department of Theology.

That agreement was in place for many years and served both organizations well. Today, it is our shared history and the spirit of collaboration that endures. Valparaiso University has representation on the LDA's Board of Directors in an advisory capacity. The LDA continues to be involved with University faculty, staff, and students, particularly in the areas of worship, mission, church vocations, and the Institute of Liturgical Studies. We also maintain a strong relationship with the Valparaiso University Guild and are grateful for its support, as well as the support of many Valparaiso University alums.

The LDA welcomes the Valpo community at Wednesday morning worship at the Center for Diaconal Ministry, and the Center is used for many departmental functions – formal and informal. Our grounds have long offered a welcoming lunch spot, solitary respite, and place for conversation among colleagues.

I realize how much I am a part of the history of both organizations: This year, I celebrated 33 years as a consecrated LDA deaconess, a Valpo alum, and a Valparaiso University Guild member. Earlier in the fall, I was the grateful recipient of a Valparaiso University Alumni Award, which recognizes outstanding achievement in career or professional life. I give thanks to God, the LDA, and Valparaiso University for the many opportunities I have had in my life. I loved my time at Valpo. And I'm grateful to have had amazing roommates and friends.



LDA Staff raise a glass in thanks for new outdoor patio furniture made possible by a grant from the Valparaiso University Guild and a gift from a generous donor.

I have treasured the LDA's partnership with Valparaiso University in so many ways over the years, and I look forward to the good work we can continue to do together in God's mission field.

Faith and service in Christ,

Deaconess Lisa S. Polito, Executive Director

MISSION

Preparing and supporting the whole people of God in Christ's call to serve.

As the LDA:

1. We form, send, and nurture communities of deaconesses and deacons in a Lutheran context to serve in all walks of life.
2. We value ecumenism in our Christian call to serve.
3. We energize people to serve among and advocate for all affected by brokenness; and seek to restore wholeness for all creation.

VISION

Following Christ, people of God serve those across the street and around the world.

www.theLDA.org

Awards

Dawn Riske Honored for Musical Contributions

Deaconess Dawn Riske is the 2023 recipient of the Avis Blewett Award of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Guild of Organists (AGO). The esteemed award recognizes those “who have made a significant contribution to the musical life of the Saint Louis area.”

“I am grateful to receive this award while in a room of friends who are purveyors of wonder and artisans of awe,” Dawn said.

Dawn serves as Director of Music Ministries at Christ the King Parish in University City, Missouri. She also accompanies the weekly Hispanic Mass at St. Joseph Parish, Manchester, Missouri, and teaches private music lessons.

Read more about the award on page 4 of THE OPUS, the chapter’s official publication, at <https://www.agostlouis.org/.../04/May-2023-online-PDF.pdf>



Dr. William Sullivan presents Deaconess Dawn Riske with the Avis Blewett Award at the Spring Banquet and Annual Meeting of the American Guild of Organists, Saint Louis Chapter, on May 22.



Artwork: Deaconess Carole Ford

Call for Nominations: Light Bearer Congregational Service Award

Nominations are due by Feb. 1, 2024, for the LDA’s Light Bearer Congregational Service Award. This new award seeks to highlight faith communities which exemplify the LDA’s vision: “Following Christ, people of God serve those across the street and around the world.” It recognizes a congregation’s witness through service to its members, the local community, and the world.

Visit the LDA’s website at <https://thelda.org/service-awards/#lbcsa> to learn more and complete a nomination form at <https://form.jotform.com/230995456739069>. Questions: Contact Deaconess Deb Lennox at debra.lennox@valpo.edu.

The Servant Ministry Support Committee will select the congregation to be honored in April 2024.



Welcome, Stephanie!

Stephanie Kinkade joined the LDA staff in February 2023 as Administration and Hospitality Coordinator. Stephanie was recommended for the position by her predecessor, Paula Katsahnias, who left the LDA in February to pursue another job opportunity.

“The community here is like nothing else I have ever experienced,” Stephanie said. “If there is a need, someone will be there to help, to smile, and to hold a hand. That is what the LDA is all about.”

Stephanie recently retired from Valparaiso University after nearly 22 years of service. Prior to her employment at the University, she raised her two children and volunteered for her church, Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, and other organizations. Stephanie is an alumna of philanthropic service groups/sororities Beta Gamma Upsilon and Beta Sigma. Read more at <https://thelda.org/team/stephanie-kinkade/>.

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Designating Thrivent Choice Dollars Really Matters

Dear Thrivent Members,
Did you know that the LDA received \$10,300 in Thrivent Choice Dollars in the first eight months of 2023? It’s a quick and easy way to support the LDA, but you have to make the designation every year.

Visit <https://www.thrivent.com/about-us/membership/thrivent-choice> for details and instructions to designate. Or call 800-847-4836 and state “Thrivent Choice” at the prompt. Remember that you need to request your dollars go to the Lutheran Diaconal Association. Thank you for supporting us!

Consecrations: A Time to Celebrate!



Photos: Carol Anne Hartman

Emily Edwards

Consecrated: February 5, 2023, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hickory, North Carolina.

Ministry: NewSong Worship Curator & Lead Musician, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church.

What I Remember: Being called to public ministry is a powerful thing, and I am blessed to have found the LDA to help me live into that call. At my consecration service, more than 100 people gathered around me for the laying on of hands. As they gathered, they unknowingly formed the shape of a cross. The prayer that is offered at that point in the rite begins, "Generous and loving God, in the life, death, and resurrection of your Servant Jesus, you call us to service shaped by the cross." It is in that spirit that I hope to serve God's people and live out my call.



Photos: Carmine Polito

Regina Mendenhall

Consecrated: May 7, 2023, St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Omaha, Nebraska.

Ministry: Social Work Mental Health Therapist, Spence Counseling Center, Lawrence, Kansas; Worship and Music Ministry team, schedule, train, and serve as Assisting Minister and Church Quilter, St. Thomas Lutheran Church; volunteer guardian and whatever else God wants me to do!

What I Remember: Laying on of hands was the most powerful moment. All the people gathered around me as if making a safe cocoon. I couldn't see and had to trust what was about to happen. It was then, unexpectedly, my breath stopped when someone (Deaconess Juanita Ebert) read Isaiah 40:31. This passage has held me together for many years and to hear it read at this very moment, weakened my legs and I stopped breathing. I started to fall. I did all I could to tell myself to breathe and I would be OK. It was reassuring to know others were around to protect and support me from falling. My wait was over. I was home.



Rodney West-Estell

Consecrated: July 16, 2023, St. Francis Retreat Center, DeWitt, Michigan.

Ministry: Assistant Sunday School Teacher at Memorial Lutheran Church, Toledo, Ohio; Lawn and garden care for seniors; Small group Bible study instruction; Assist as a reader during church services.

What I Remember: The most memorable moment was the enormous support from the Community of Lutheran Deacons and the Lutheran Diaconess Conference communities.

Photos: Sophia Odendahl



Jeff Hazewinkel

Consecrated: July 16, 2023, St. Francis Retreat Center, DeWitt, Michigan.

Ministry: Manager of Music Programs and Concert Productions, Yale Institute of Sacred Music, New Haven, Connecticut.

What I Remember: Since the consecration service was part of the Community of Lutheran Deacons Annual Meeting, my mind was filled with the thousands of details connected to the service, guests, the livestream (compounded by an internet outage), the dinner, and every other imaginable thought – including my words of welcome/homily at the start of the service. There was a great deal of pressure. Then, rising from all of this energy, came the confidence of the call, all the pieces lined up in a way that reflected upon myself, the diaconate, my faith, and my calling into a community. The Lord spoke through all the hands laid upon me and said “welcome.” And the Peace that passes all understanding embraced me.

Photos: Sophia Odendahl

Student Seminars

Formation Seminars Equip Students for Diaconal Ministry

Eleven LDA students journeyed to Valparaiso, Indiana, in March for their weeklong formation Seminar at the Center for Diaconal Ministry. Deaconesses Deb Lennox and Barb Herzinger, the LDA's Co-Directors of Education and Formation, facilitated the Seminar around the theme, Ecumenism and Our Call to Serve, with a focus on the LDA Hallmarks of Mutuality and Diaconal Focus. Community-building and experiential learning activities are the core components of Student Seminar. (See photos below.)

The second Seminar of 2023 was held October 1-7. Four new students and one returning student attended. Read about each day's adventures on the LDA's Facebook page, or watch for photos in the next issue of LDA Today.



TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: Student Almuth Koby, left, participates in a student-led project about LDA Hallmarks while project leaders Kelly (Rayner) Kacir and Kris Delaney observe. Deaconesses join LDA students and staff for the Milestone in Formation Evening Worship, officially welcoming new students Stephen Abbott and Michelle Wandersee into community. Deaconess Bonnie Beversdorf, left, enjoys some St. Patrick's Day fun with student Erin Kaiser.

LEFT: Students at March Seminar, back row, from left: Hannah Koby, Almuth Koby, Karen Davidson, Kris Delaney, Erin Kaiser, Marcella Jimenez; front row, from left: Brandon Kruger, Robin Domeier, Kelly (Rayner) Kacir, Michelle Wandersee, Stephen Abbott.

Remembering Student Stephen Abbott

One of the LDA's new deacon students, Stephen Abbott, died unexpectedly in June, and the LDA community continues to mourn his loss.

Deaconess Barb Herzinger, LDA Co-Director of Education and Formation, shared this remembrance: "Stephen attended his first Student Seminar in March of this year. He was so excited and nervous to be here, but Stephen found his people and his place. Throughout the Seminar, Stephen became more engaged and joyful, more comfortable sharing himself and more certain of his call to diaconal ministry. Stephen was full of compassion. He reached out to the other students, got to know them, and stayed in contact."

Stephen had recently graduated from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary and was approved for Word and Service with the Southeastern Synod ELCA on April 21. He was looking forward to beginning a chaplaincy residency. When Stephen graduated from LTSS, he texted all of the staff at the LDA with these happy words: "I wore my LDA pin on my graduation robe!"

In July, the Community of Lutheran Deacons established The Stephen Abbott Memorial Fund. The fund honors Stephen's memory by providing financial assistance to deacon students. See page 8 for more information about the fund.

Please keep Stephen's parents, family and friends in your prayers. May the sure promise of the Resurrection bring us all hope and comfort in this difficult time.



Events



Diaconal Communities Gather Across the Street and Around the World!

The Lutheran Deaconess Conference gathered on the campus of Valparaíso University for its 89th Annual Meeting in July 2023. Deaconesses and friends from the United States, Canada, and Brazil came together for worship, workshops, community, and conversation both in person and on Zoom.

Lutheran Deaconess Conference (LDC)

The LDC gathered around the theme, *Deeply Rooted in God: Caring Creator*, during its annual meeting on the campus of Valparaíso University, July 20-24. It was the first of three annual meeting themes drawing upon the wisdom of the LDA's Diaconal Litany, and will be followed by *Deeply Rooted in God: Redeemer and Friend*, and *Deeply Rooted in God: Giver of Life*. The group was introduced to a communal discernment process in the Quaker tradition and practiced it over the course of the meeting. The LDC Anti-Racism Work Group presented its report about the "Journey to a Brave Space" reflections that engaged members of the community during the past year.

Daily worship was fully integrated with the *Caring Creator* theme, including an outdoor service at Gabis Arboretum. A variety of workshops were presented – from self-care to meditative drawing to learning more about area ministries. And the capstone of the gathering was the banquet and storytelling that honored deaconesses celebrating major anniversaries of consecration and the opportunity to visit with their family and friends.

LDA Renewal Events

Prior to the LDC meeting, deaconesses had the opportunity to participate in one of two renewal events, made possible through a generous gift from a friend of the LDA. One event gathered six recently consecrated deaconesses to reflect on their diaconal journey thus far. The other event celebrated the 80th anniversary of affiliation between Valparaíso University and the LDA, featuring tours of the campus and a meeting with University President José Padilla.

LDC Officers

- President: Deborah Matern Graf
- Vice President: Hilary Hefferlin
- Secretary: Gloria Stubitsch
- Treasurer: Beverly Lund
- At Large: Penny Cedel, Beth Chittim
- LDA Liaison: Lisa Polito
- Student Representative: Michelle Wandersee



FAR LEFT: Newly consecrated deaconesses participate in a renewal event. From left: Deaconesses Amy Smessaert, Claire Schoepp (facilitator), Brittany Barkus, Karen Hernes, Carrie Sovola, Brenda Pollalis, Regina Mendenhall, and Amanda Spangler (facilitator).

LEFT: Enjoying time at Valparaíso University's Center for the Sciences with Assistant Professor of Chemistry Dr. Paul F. Smith, far right, are, from left, Dr. Michael and Deaconess Ann Marie Rehbein, Deaconess Beth Olejniczak, and Deaconess Juanita Ebert. The campus tour was part of a renewal event.

Events



LEFT: Members of the Community of Lutheran Deacons at their Annual Meeting in July at St. Francis Retreat Center. Left to right, Deacon Rodney West-Estell, Deacon Ben Ema, Deacon Jeff Hazewinkel, Deacon Student Brandon Kruger, Deacon Andrew Stoebig, and Deacon Matthew Petersen. RIGHT: The LDA contingent gathered at the river in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for the 2023 Assembly of Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC) in August.

Community of Lutheran Deacons (CLD)

The CLD met July 16-19 at St. Francis Retreat Center, DeWitt, Michigan. The meeting began with a joint consecration service for Rodney West-Estell and Jeff Hazewinkel (see article page 5). The group focused on the theme, How We Pray is Who We Are: Diaconal Identity and Mission through a Liturgical Lens, facilitated by Deacon Douglas Argue, Southern Ohio Diocese of the Episcopal Church.

The CLD also established The Stephen Abbott Memorial Fund. Stephen, a deacon student, died unexpectedly in June 2023. The fund honors Stephen's memory by providing financial assistance to deacon students to pay formation costs not covered by LDA scholarships. Funds can help pay for CPE, academic coursework, or annual meeting fees and expenses, thereby removing financial barriers for those seeking consecration. To read more about Stephen, see page 6.

CLD Officers

- President: Matthew Petersen
- Vice President: Jeff Hazewinkel
- Secretary: Brandon Kruger
- Treasurer: Andrew Stoebig
- At Large: Galen Shriner, Ben Ema
- LDA Liaison: Lisa Polito
- Student Representative: Matthew De Loera

DOTAC: Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean

More than 150 deaconesses, deacons, and diaconal ministers from throughout the Americas and Caribbean participated in the 2023 DOTAC Assembly, August 14-18 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The LDA was well represented, with more than 30 members of the diaconate in attendance. Participants explored the theme Gather at the River: Connect, Heal, Engage.

Speakers Joe Davis, a poet and artist in North Minneapolis, and Angela Two Stars, a public artist and curator, helped attendees explore the depths and interconnectedness of joy, hope, and lament. Those themes flowed through daily worship that expressed varied faith and cultural traditions. The Assembly also featured workshops, table group discussions, and visits to area cultural sites and ministries.

Oh, the places we've been ... and the people we've met!

Your LDA staff has traveled from coast to coast, spreading the good news about the LDA, recruiting potential students, and engaging with current and potential ministry partners. Between January and August, the LDA exhibited at Valparaiso University's Spiritual Life Fair; 2023 ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering; ELCA African Descent Lutheran Association National Assembly; LWML Convention; Best Practices in Ministry Conference (where we also gave a workshop on the LDA's Discernment Guide); and the ELCA Extravaganza.



LDA Director of Recruitment Deaconess Adrainne Gray, center, visits with students at Duke Divinity School.

We were invited to preach, lead Bible studies, and share about diaconal ministry with various church and university groups, including Lutheran Church of the Atonement, Atlanta, Georgia; Lutheran students at Duke Divinity School; and St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Durham, North Carolina. We also gave a workshop on recruitment at the Lutheran Deaconess Conference Annual Meeting in Valparaiso, Indiana.

As a result we ...

- Admitted 6 new students to the LDA's education and formation program.
- Are in conversation with 3 adults who are applying to the LDA this fall.
- Are walking with 18 people who are discerning a call to the LDA.
- Engaged with hundreds of women and men with diaconal hearts, and are following up with those who want to learn more about the LDA.

Endowed Scholarships

“We like the idea of investing in people!”

Scholarships Help Students Answer God's Call

Thanks to many generous donors, the LDA has 22 endowed scholarships and a general scholarship fund to support students in the education/formation program. In this issue of LDA Today, Deaconess Barbara Kloehn-Pyle shares what prompted her and husband Jerry Pyle to establish the Deaconess Barbara Kloehn-Pyle Endowed Scholarship in 2023.

When I was a deaconess student at Valparaiso University, Valpo President Rev. Dr. O.P. Kretzmann used to come to Deaconess Hall for dinner nearly every month. He was a perfect guest, of course, always asking lots of questions regarding our studies and how we planned to use our training and theology majors in the church, and out in the world! He was an early advocate for professional, full-time careers for women in the church.

President Kretzmann didn't just talk encouragement; he also gave us tuition scholarships every semester to the tune of \$250. Already at Concordia University, St. Paul, I tried to work almost every weekend – cleaning people's homes and babysitting – raising funds for my education. I continued to do that while living in Valparaiso. So, the scholarship money was a godsend, and it helped me stay a deaconess student. I filed the Kretzmann witness and generosity in my mind.

When COVID-19 happened, it nudged me and my husband, Jerry, to focus more on our future and our charitable giving. It's a cliché, but we wanted to put down on paper how/where we could 'give back.' We chose to fund an LDA Endowed Scholarship because I know there are many deaconess/deacon students who could use a little extra financial help – just like I did 50-some years ago. The endowment funds might be the positive difference between someone deciding whether or not they would be able to study and train in our community. The vision of LDA students becoming the hands and feet, the heart and voice of the Gospel in our world today, that gives me hope and joy.

Jerry and I like the idea of investing in people! We know that diaconal students today face a very complicated world – perhaps making their ministry preparation more important and urgent than ever.

I've always found it amazing how varied the talents of my diaconal siblings are. We all have unique gifts to share at different times in our lives. My involvement in our community is pretty limited at this point in my life. But Jerry and I are grateful that we still have the breath of God in us every day. And we made some choices. We pray that our participation in the LDA Endowed Scholarship fund may, in some small way, be a blessing to others.

— Deaconess Barbara Kloehn-Pyle, consecrated May 28, 1972



Deaconess Barbara Kloehn-Pyle and Jerry Pyle enjoy the sunshine in front of a century-old corn crib on the family farmstead, Stoney Front Farm, in Garfield, Minnesota. Barbara's great-grandparents homesteaded in 1880.

April 2023 LDA Board Meeting Highlights

The Board prayed together, installed new members, approved three diaconal students for consecration, listened to LDA staff and committee reports, and participated in a lively conversation about why people support the mission of the LDA. Board members also joined dozens of volunteer callers and helpers at the LDA's annual Phonathon. We give thanks to God for our hardworking LDA Board members who give so generously of their expertise, time, and talent in pursuit of our mission and vision!



ABOVE LEFT: The board approved these students for consecration (left to right): Jeff Hazewinkel, Regina Mendenhall, and Lisa Swayne. Photos of Regina's and Jeff's consecrations are on pages 4 and 5. Lisa was consecrated on September 16, 2023; photos will be in the next issue of LDA Today. ABOVE RIGHT: The LDA Board of Directors and staff (left to right): Front row: Deaconess Deborah Matern Graf; Layman Keith Williams; Deacon Andrew Stoebig. Second row: Deaconess Student Erin Kaiser (newly installed); Laywoman Jeanne Mockard, Treasurer (newly installed); Deaconess Jean Warren, President; Laywoman Julie Lehmann, Secretary; Deaconess Ann Baas; Laywoman Maryn Olson; Pastor Amy Schiffrin; Deaconess Liesl Begnaud (newly installed). Third row: Pastor Tom Stoebig; Deaconess Adrainne Gray, staff; Deaconess Deb Lennox, staff; Deaconess Barb Herzinger, staff; Pastor Kate Museum Dabay, Valparaiso University Liaison; Deaconess Lisa Polito, LDA Executive Director; Layman Mike Steffen, Vice President; Pastor Ted Engelbrecht (newly installed). On screen: Deacon Student Jeff Hazewinkel and Deaconess Gloria Stubitsch.

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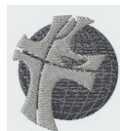
Snuggle Up in LDA Spiritwear

This cozy fleece throw featuring the LDA logo is just one of the winter weather items in the LDA store at Lands' End, conveniently located on our website at <https://business.landsend.com/store/thelda/>. What a deal: You can help promote the LDA and get an early start on your holiday shopping!

The LDA logo can be applied on any item you choose, including shawls, jackets, vests, hats, scarves, shirts, etc. Not only can you customize the colors of the logo to your heart's content, you can also choose design options: the LDA logo only, name only, or both (see images below). We've found that the size or style of some items lend themselves to a simpler presentation of the LDA logo/name.

While most items in the LDA store can be purchased individually, some promotional items require a minimum quantity. Lands' End customer service is available to answer your questions or help place your order.

Thank you for spreading the word about the LDA in this fun way!



Lutheran Deaconesses and Deacons serve Christ across the street and around the world.

The *LDA Today* is published to further the LDA's mission and is not engaged in rendering legal or tax advice. Errors, questions, and subscription changes may be addressed to the LDA, Center for Diaconal Ministry, 1304 LaPorte Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383 USA, (219) 464-6925, www.theLDA.org, or deacserv@valpo.edu.