

Winter/Spring 2023

Springmires Honored with Diakonia en Christo Award for Disaster Outreach Ministry

For their service to those in need, especially in times of disaster, Pete and Christel Springmire received the LDA's Diakonia en Christo Award on June 26 at Immanuel Lutheran Church, DeKalb, Illinois. The award celebrates the ministries of Lutheran lay people who, in following Christ, reach out in care and compassion to a hurting world.

Deaconess Lisa Polito, LDA Executive Director, presented the award. She noted that while the Springmires care for their congregation and community in many ways, it is their work with Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT) – a disaster outreach ministry of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod – that their daughter Laura Venstrom highlighted when nominating her parents for the award.

In the midst of devastation, Pete carves a cross in a tree stump so that it is visible to the families they serve – reminding them of God's loving presence and the presence of the LERT teams called to provide compassionate service to those who are suffering.

Christel and Pete say they are blessed to serve God's people in this way. They love that LERT shows up to help all in need, regardless of religious beliefs, race, socioeconomic status, etc. It is a ministry full of people who love others the way that Christ loves them, and Pete and Christel are shining examples of that.

Congratulations, Pete and Christel, and thank you for all you do for others!



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Springmires receive the LDA's Diakonia en Christo Award for their compassionate outreach ministry in times of disaster. From left, Christel Springmire, son-in-law Luke Venstrom and daughter Laura Venstrom, and Pete Springmire. Pete and Christel's grandchildren, Sam, Claire, and Reid Venstrom, join in the celebration. Deaconess Lisa Polito, Executive Director of the LDA, presents the award to Pete and Christel at Immanuel Lutheran Church, DeKalb, Illinois.

About the award

Since the earliest days of the church, deaconesses and deacons have had a special concern for those in need in this world that God loves so much. But this is part of the calling of every baptized child of God.

The LDA makes the Diakonia en Christo (service in Christ) award in honor of two deaconesses whose diaconal hearts have especially exemplified the service to which Christ calls us all – Deaconess Martha Eber and Deaconess Martha Boss.

Deaconess Martha Eber was consecrated in 1924, after graduating from Lutheran

Hospital Nurses Training School, Fort Wayne, Indiana. She was the first LDA deaconess to serve in a parish and worked with immigrants in New York. Read more at https://thelda.org/100-years-of-service-deaconess-martha...

Over her lifetime, Deaconess Martha Boss cared for and loved those who were often forgotten by others. After World War II, she was commissioned as a deaconess-missionary-nurse and served in China and Hong Kong. Read more at https://thelda.org/100-years-of-service-deaconess-martha...



Executive Director's Corner

Thankfulness and Praise!

Dear friends,

I'm so thankful for a number of new staff here at the LDA!

Paula Katsahnias joined us in August as the Administration and Hospitality Coordinator. When you call the Center, usually she is the person who answers the phone.

Deaconess Adrainne Gray works remotely from Decatur, Georgia, as part-time Director of Recruitment. Adrainne also serves with Lutheran World Federation as Communication Officer.

New Co-Director of Education and Formation Deaconess Barb Herzinger joined us after more than 30 years as a parish deaconess. Barb has a lot of previous experience at the LDA, serving on a number of committees, the LDC Board, and as a mentor for students.

Also in 2022, the LDA said goodbye to Mary Hohnke, longtime administrative assistant, who retired. We give thanks for Mary and her years of service and support of the LDA's mission.

Praising God for an in-person concurrent Annual Meeting of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference and Community of Lutheran Deacons!

August found LDA deaconesses and deacons meeting in beautiful Vancouver, Washington. I would love to tell you stories of the excitement of being back together for the first time in YEARS. I would love to tell you about the joy of worshiping and singing praises to God in person. I would love to tell you about deep conversations that happened around table groups. But, I can't. On the way to Vancouver, I got COVID and spent the entire time quarantined in my hotel room. I can, though, tell you that deep conversations and joyful worshiping did happen on Zoom with the 40+ deaconesses who were online!

Thankfulness for our first deaconess!

November 1, 2022, was the 100th anniversary of the consecration of Ina Kempff Meyer, the LDA's first deaconess. We give thanks to God for that milestone and the 802 consecrations that have followed for women and men answering God's call. For those of us on Zoom during the Annual Meeting, we were honored to have a number of Ina's family join us for conversation. From New Jersey to Australia, we heard stories of the many ways that Ina served God's people throughout her life.

And, I want to say that I'm thankful for each of you reading this letter – for the prayer support you give, for the ways that you serve in your community, for the ways that you tell the story of the LDA. I hope that you will enjoy the articles in this newsletter – stories of lay people serving God, stories of our students, our consecrations, and our donors! And, I hope you go to our website and check out some great LDA Spirit Wear!

Faith and service in Christ,

Deaconess Lisa S. Polito, Executive Director



TOP: LDA staff, from left: Deaconess Amy Smessaert, Paula Katsahnias, Deaconess Adrainne Gray, Deaconess Lisa Polito, Deaconess Deb Lennox, Deaconess Barb Herzinger, and Gloria Hanks. RIGHT: Former staff member Mary Hohnke



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

Diane Greve Receives Christus in Mundo Award for Chaplaincy, Pastoral Care



Deaconess Diane Greve, right, holds the Christus in Mundo Award, which she received in July. Celebrating with her is Deaconess Deb Robinson.

Deaconess Diane Greve received the Christus in Mundo (Christ in the World) Award, which recognizes outstanding service in the ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education. Diane is the first ELCA woman to receive this award since it was created 30 years ago.

"I was humbled by the honor of receiving this award and following in the footsteps of the likes of Granger Westberg, Tom Droege, and the almost 40 others who have received this over the years," said Diane, who was nominated by her peers. "So much of what I have contributed has been behind the scenes and this is an honor."

Diane's contributions include serving on Churchwide, Regional, and Synodical committees over the years; chairing and serving on Zion Conference committees; and co-editing Caring Connections, an inter-Lutheran online journal for practitioners and teachers of pastoral care and counseling. Now rostered as a Word and Sacrament minister, she was certified as an ACPE (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education) educator as a deaconess in 2000.

Rev. John Schumacher, chair of the award selection committee, presented the Christus in Mundo Award to Diane at a ceremony on July 21, 2022, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Deaconess Deb Robinson and Deacon Steve Arnold were present, as was Rev. Ann Svennungsen, Bishop of the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA, who spoke at the award breakfast.

In 1992, the Christus in Mundo Award was first given to four men who were significant in the development of Lutheran chaplaincy. Every three years, more awards were given at the Zion Conference, an inter-Lutheran gathering for specialized pastoral care ministers. Only one other woman, Deaconess Dorothy Prybylski, has received this award.

Congratulations! Deaconesses Receive VU Alumni Awards

We are thrilled that two members of the LDA community were recognized by Valparaíso University during Homecoming festivities in late September. Deaconess Rhoda Grever '77 Schuler received the Alumni Achievement Award, which honors alumni who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in their chosen career or area of professional life. Deaconess Kristen Bruner '93 Baltrum received the Alumni Community Service Award. This award honors alumni who have enhanced the prestige of the University by virtue of their character and integrity through outstanding service in their communities, including religious, civic, or charitable organizations or programs, either local or national in scope and structure.



LEFT: Valparaíso University President José Padilla presents Deaconess Kristen Baltrum with the Alumni Community Service Award. RIGHT: Deaconess Rhoda Schuler, who received the Alumni Achievement Award, stands with her husband, Rev. Mark Schuler, at the awards banquet.



Light Bearer Award Recognizes Congregations

"The Light of Christ! Thanks be to God!" – Service of Light, Easter Vigil

This 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. Created by the Servant Ministry Support Committee, the Light Bearer Congregational Award will launch in 2023.

The Bearer of the Light image comes from the traditional role of deacons to light the paschal candle during the Easter Vigil and to bear this sign of the light of the risen Christ to the waiting congregation. This rich image embodies the role of all Christians to carry the light of Christ's love to the world through loving service – called *diakonia*, from the Greek word for service.

This kind of *diakonia* is about having the light, bearing the light, being the light, and shedding light. This kind of *diakonia* is about hope and knowing that what we see is not always what we get. This kind of *diakonia* is about having a vision ... that seeks to see with the eyes of God and to speak with the voice of God. It is to see the shalom, the wholeness of creation restored. It is to live from that vision, and it is to live toward that vision. It is to take the risk of exposing and calling into question anything that is contrary to that vision.

Sometimes we teach, equip, empower, liberate others for doing this ministry in the world. Always we are signs, living reminders that God calls all the people of God to *diakonia*. This *diakonia* spans the whole spectrum from washing feet on bended knee to standing on tiptoes and prophetically challenging the principalities and powers. And the Spirit gives us differing gifts for this rich variety of ministry.

Submit nominations for the Light Bearer Congregational Service Award by September 1, 2023. Application details are available on the LDA's website at thelda.org/serve/. Contact Deaconess Deb Lennox at debra.lennox@valpo.edu.

Consecrations: A Time to Celebrate!



Amy Smessaert

Consecrated: June 4, 2022, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Mishawaka, Indiana.

Ministry: Director of Development and Public Relations, Lutheran Diaconal Association, Valparaiso, Indiana; Stephen Leader, Taking Off the Mask ministry, and women's ministry, St. Peter Lutheran Church.

What I Remember: Being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses! I experienced a sense of the universal church as members of three diaconates and other faith traditions participated in my consecration. I still get goosebumps when I remember various groups, like the Sisters of the Holy Cross, saying a blessing as I knelt at the altar.



Photos: Dave Gurnee



Karen Hernes

Consecrated: September 17, 2022, Gloria Christi, Chapel of the Resurrection, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana.

Ministry: Clinical Assistant Professor, College of Nursing and Health Professions, Valparaiso University; developing new course for VU called Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice in Healthcare; and Mom to two teenage daughters.

What I Remember: I was very blessed to have so many people from different parts of my life come to celebrate and worship with us, participate in worship, and just be there for support. My daughters and good friend Nicole provided beautiful music, Pastor Erica Gibson-Even created a warm welcome space for everyone, and Deaconess Kristin Lewis preached the gospel. Many others from the deac community served in various ways, and friends helped host a fun reception at the LDA afterwards.



Photos: Amy Smessaert and Jeanne Mockard



Photos: Raymond Pollalis

Brenda Pollalis

Consecrated: December 10, 2022, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Highland, Indiana.

Ministry: Chaplain at St. Mary's Medical Center, Hobart, Indiana.

What I Remember: What an awesome day that was five years in the making. The readings reflected my theology, and the music inspired and uplifted me. About 100 people joined in virtually, amazing! The service concluded with "Take My Life, That I May Be," and my sisters in Christ were dancing in the pews. That was a joyous ending!

Student Seminars and Recruitment



TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: Student Kelly Rayner presents Robin Domeier with her student pin. Students at June Seminar, back row: Marcella Jimenez, Matthew De Loera, Robin Domeier, Jeff Hazewinkel, Rodney West-Estell; front row: Erin Kaiser, Kelly Rayner, Regina Mendenhall, Kris Delaney, Lisa Smith. Student Matthew De Loera leads evening worship. BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT: Student Karen Davidson and Deaconesses Edie Eickemeyer and Lisa Polito enjoy good conversation. Deaconess Ann Arnold, center, guides students through an art therapy session. Students at August Seminar, from left, Maddie Brown, Lisa Swayne, Karen Davidson.

What Joy: In-person Student Seminars Resume

Thirteen LDA students gathered at the Center for Diaconal Ministry this summer for their week-long student formation Seminar. It was a time of getting acquainted – or reacquainted – with one another, especially for those who had never been to the Center or who had not met their fellow students in person, due to COVID restrictions.

Deaconesses Deb Lennox and Barb Herzinger, the LDA's Co-Directors of Education and Formation, facilitated the seminar around the theme "Form, Send, and Nurture: Care-full Community and Healthy Ministry," with a focus on two LDA Hallmarks: Intentionality of Vocation and Community. Community building and experiential learning activities are the core components of the student seminars.

Ten students attended the June Seminar; three attended in August. The 2023 Student Seminars will be held March 12-18 and October 1-7.



From Atlanta to Boise, the LDA is There

With COVID restrictions eased, the LDA staff have been on the road – spreading the good news about the LDA, recruiting potential students, and engaging with current and potential ministry partners. Between July and November, the LDA exhibited at conferences for these organizations: ELCA African Descent Lutheran Association; Southeastern Synod, Women of the ELCA; Lutheran Education Association; and Lutheran Outdoor Ministries. We also participated at Valparaiso University's Ministry Fair and Activities Fair.

As a result, we ...

- Admitted new students to the LDA's education and formation program.
- Are in conversation with adults who are actively discerning a call to the LDA.
- Invited VU new students to Wednesday morning worship and Advent Soup Suppers.
- Engaged with hundreds of women and men about the LDA and its mission and are following up with those who have expressed interest in learning more.

We are grateful for these good – and productive – conversations as we continue to form, send, and nurture communities of deaconesses and deacons to serve in all walks of life. Thank you for your generous support, which enables us to tell others about the LDA!

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: At Valparaiso University (VU) Activities Fair, left to right, LDA student Maddie Brown, Deaconess Adrainne Gray, VU senior Kaitlyn Jedrzejewski, and Deaconess Amy Smessaert. Deaconess Barb Herzinger, left, with Rev. Katherine Museus Dabay at VU Ministry Fair. Deaconess Adrainne Gray, left, with Rev. Jeanette Perrault, Director of Admissions at Wartburg Seminary, at Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Conference.

Endowed Scholarships

Helping Students Answer God's Call

Scholarships Reflect a Family's Faith

Thanks to many generous donors, the LDA has 21 endowed scholarships and a general scholarship fund to support students in the formation/education program. In this issue of LDA Today, we take a look at the stories of faith and service of the Albers and Plackner families that are foundational to the Edgar Albers Scholarship and the Elaine Plackner Scholarship.

The Edgar Albers Scholarship: Edgar Albers, father of Deaconess Elaine Albers Plackner, was a Lutheran pastor, President of the LDA Board of Directors, and a long-time board member. He died in 1996.

"Service to others was always there in our family, in all kinds of ways," said Lois Lucas, one of four daughters of Edgar and Gertrude Albers. "Our father was a pastor and my mother was a nurse, and her father was a pastor and my dad's father was a teacher. It's genetics – all those pieces go together. This is your identity."

Her sister, Ellen Vance, agreed. "The church and serving are who we are and what we've always been as a family. It's the center of our lives. It's how we were oriented. When we sisters (Carolyn, Elaine, Ellen, and Lois) got together, we would always talk about God. Our faith in God was part of the conversation."

Ellen, a retired professional fund-raiser, consulted with the LDA Board of Directors on development matters. Lois' call was teaching. Both remain committed to supporting the mission of the LDA and shared how that connection was forged 75 years ago.

"In 1946, our father, Rev. E. H. Albers accepted a call to Fort Wayne, Indiana, and became the first pastor of Peace Lutheran Church," Lois said. "It was while serving this call that he probably became aware of the Lutheran Deaconess Association in a personal way. He believed,

like the pastors who began the Deaconess Program in 1919, that women had many spiritual gifts and talents which could enrich and support the work of pastoral ministry and congregational life."

Although the LDA training school moved to Valparaiso, Indiana, in 1943, its headquarters remained in Fort Wayne. Edgar Albers began serving on the LDA Board in 1948 and continued through 1971. Even after accepting a call to Calvary Lutheran Church in Indianapolis in 1955, he remained on the board, making those monthly trips to Fort Wayne.

"When I was a child, I remember Dad going to Fort Wayne and Valpo for meetings," recalled Ellen.

"Our father was committed to defining a role for the service of women in the church," Lois added. "I believe his work with the Deaconess Association influenced his efforts to support resolutions that would allow women to be elected or appointed to serve on synodical committees or offices, and that would allow women to vote and hold office within congregations."



LEFT: Deaconess Elaine Albers kneels during her consecration service on June 21, 1964, at Calvary Lutheran Church, Indianapolis, Indiana. LDA Executive Director Walter Gerken preached, Deaconess-in-Residence Edie Hovey presented the deaconess cross, and Deaconess Lucy Wiese presented the consecration certificate. At left is Elaine's father, Rev. Edgar H. Albers, who also participated in the service and was serving as the LDA Board President. Read more about Elaine at thelda.org/100-years-of-service-deaconess-elaine-plackner/. Photo courtesy of Lois Lucas

BELOW: Deaconess Elaine Albers Plackner



The Elaine Plackner Scholarship: Elaine Albers Plackner was a deaconess, consecrated in 1964, the wife of a Lutheran pastor, and President of the LDA Board of Directors. She died in 1997.

“Elaine enrolled at Valpo with the intention of becoming a deaconess,” Lois said. “I was only 8 when she left for college but I did visit her on campus several times. I was able to go with her when she practiced organ in the chapel. As a family, we traveled to Long Island, New York, to see where she was doing her one-year internship.”

Another year, Lois spent a week with Elaine in Detroit where she did a summer internship in the inner city, counseling families with terminally ill children. After Elaine accepted her first call to St. Paul, Minnesota, Lois, then in middle and high school, often traveled there to help with vacation Bible school.

“Over the years, I saw her use her spiritual gifts and talents in various ways to enhance and enrich the ministry within a congregation and as a counselor in hospitals. This was true both when she was called to a position and also in her role as a pastor’s wife,” noted Lois. “She had a heart for supporting women who were serving as called workers and for pastor’s wives.”

The LDA also was dear to Elaine’s heart, and she was very involved with the deaconess community, Ellen said. Elaine was in charge of the program for the annual deaconess conference in 1997, making sure details were being attended to – even while she was receiving treatment for cancer. Elaine died before the conference was held.

“For me, the fact that both my dad and my sister invested so much into the LDA as a way to broaden ministry opportunities for women was significant,” said Lois. “I could see how a deaconess could prepare with a specific focus for their ministry. I could see the flexibility that being a deaconess offered as a person’s situation or interests developed over time.”

The family set up a scholarship as a memorial for their father. When Elaine died the following year, a second scholarship was established as a way to honor Elaine’s children and grandchildren.

“I give my contributions as a birthday present to Elaine and Dad,” Lois said. “Contributing to the LDA was a way I could honor their efforts and help ensure that the opportunities remained for those who felt God’s call to serve.”

Added Ellen, “We keep supporting the LDA because it feels good to have this be part of our own ministry.”

LDA students talk about the impact of scholarships

Each year, the LDA gives out more than \$45,000 in scholarships to help cover professional education fees for diaconal students in need. Here’s what students say receiving a scholarship has meant to them – in their lives, their diaconal formation, and their ministry.



Deaconess Student Erin Kaiser:

“I am so grateful for the scholarships I have received as a student. With the financial support of these scholarships, I don’t have to worry about finances, but rather be in the moment, be able to spend time learning, and be guided by the Spirit.”



Deaconess Student Robin Domeier:

“One benefit of receiving a scholarship is that it helps reduce my financial considerations — for which I am most appreciative. On a deeper level, knowing that others care enough to contribute funds toward the educating and formation of individuals for Kingdom service is humbling. It is yet another tangible reminder of the importance the LDA, and those associated with it, place on community.”

Support Our Students... Make a scholarship gift!

LDA students are of all ages and backgrounds. The education/formation process takes most students two to four years to complete before being consecrated for diaconal ministry. With program fees, week-long Student Seminars, coursework, and attendance at Annual Meeting, total costs for a student often exceed \$15,000. Here’s how you can help ease a student’s financial obligation:

- Contribute to the LDA’s General Scholarship Fund to provide immediate funding for current student scholarships, or designate your gift to one of the LDA’s endowed scholarships. Donate online at theLDA.org or send a check to the LDA at the Center for Diaconal Ministry, 1304 LaPorte Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383.
- Establish an endowed scholarship through the LDA’s DEAC Scholarship Fund. You may set up a fund with a gift of \$15,000 to the LDA. The total gift may be spread over as many as five years with multiple contributors. And you may name your scholarship fund in honor or memory of loved ones. To learn more, contact Deaconess Amy Smessaert, LDA Director of Development and Public Relations, at amy.smessaert@valpo.edu or 219-464-6925.

The LDA – and our students – are grateful for your support. Thank you!

Updates

Phonathon 2023!

Mark your calendars now for the LDA's annual Phonathon on April 13, 14, and 15, 2023! We look forward to this special time to see how you are doing, receive your prayer requests, and ask you to renew your gift to the LDA.



Instead of receiving a call, make a donation to the LDA ahead of Phonathon! Here's how:



Online (2 options):

- Use your smartphone to scan the QR Code to the left.
- Go to www.theLDA.org

Mail: Send a check to the LDA at 1304 LaPorte Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383

Phone: 219-464-6925

Thank you for your support! Don't want to be called? Let us know!



What a great renewal opportunity! More than three dozen deaconesses participated in renewal events in Vancouver, Washington, and Austin, Texas, that focused on group discernment. In preparation, participants read the book, *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making*. One of the authors, Jan Wood, led both renewal events and shared a process for decision-making/group discernment used by Quakers (Friends) for about 350 years. **LEFT:** Eleven deaconesses attended the Vancouver renewal event, held before the Lutheran Deaconess Conference Annual Meeting in August 2022. **RIGHT:** At the January 2023 event in Austin, 27 deaconesses and a student participated.



Thrivent Choice: An Easy Way to Give to the LDA

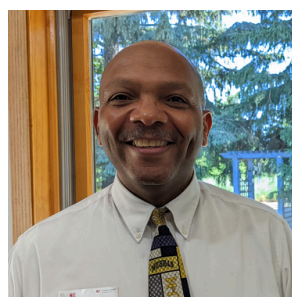
With just a few keyboard clicks or a quick phone call, you can select the LDA to receive your 2022 Thrivent Choice Dollars before they expire on March 31, 2023.

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.

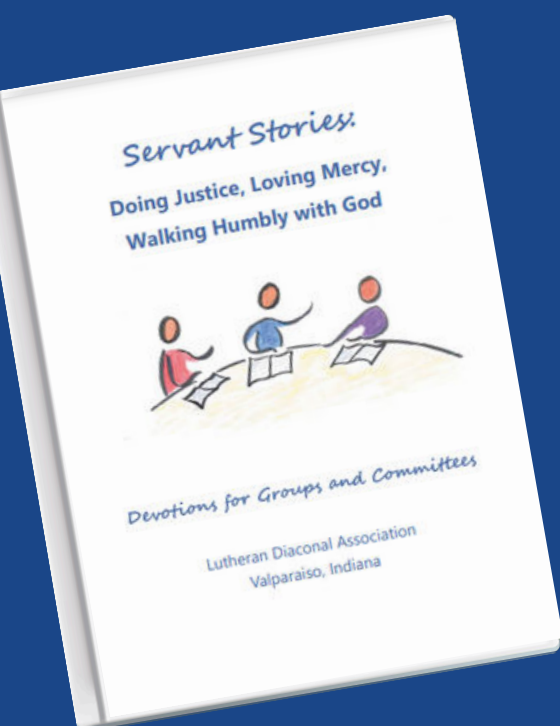
Thank you for designating the LDA! We are grateful for your support.

November 2022 LDA Board Meeting Highlights

- Approved four students for consecration: Emily Edwards, Sarah Gruendler-Ladner, Brenda Pollalis, and Rodney West-Estell.
- Wrote thank you notes to donors expressing gratitude for their support of the LDA.
- Voted for new members of the board for the 2023-24 year: Laywoman Jeanne Mockard, Treasurer; Deaconess Liesl Begnaud; Layman Tom Cedel; and Pastor Ted Engelbrecht.
- Celebrated retiring board members: Layman Chuck Denninger, Treasurer; Deaconess Lynda Schleef; and Laywoman Virginia Von Seggern.
- LDA, Inc., Annual Meeting: Special program honoring 10 years of forming men for diaconal ministry.



LEFT: The LDA Board of Directors gather for their fall meeting in Valparaiso, Indiana. Part of their work included approving four diaconal students for consecration: TOP: left, Rodney West-Estell, right, Brenda Pollalis; BOTTOM: left, Emily Edwards, right, Sarah Gruendler-Ladner. Brenda was consecrated on December 10, 2022 (see page 4). Emily was consecrated on February 5, 2023; photos will be in the next issue of LDA Today.



Servant Stories: Devotions for Groups and Committees

If you've been looking for devotions for your ministry, church, or family, check out the LDA's new booklet: *Servant Stories: Doing Justice, Loving Mercy, Walking Humbly with God*. These monthly devotions – written by LDA deaconesses, deacons, and students – help us see how God's servants live their lives. They also remind each of us of our call to live out the command in Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God."

Servant Stories invites us into deeper connection and conversation with God and with one another through hymns, Scripture, questions for reflection and discussion, prayer, and illustrations by Deaconess Judi Tyler. *Servant Stories* is free and available for download in PDF format on the LDA's website at thelda.org/resources/#devotions. You may download the entire booklet or select any of the monthly devotions. A printed copy of the booklet is available from the LDA for a small fee. Contact deacserv@valpo.edu to request a printed copy be sent to you.

We hope *Servant Stories* will enrich your life of service and your community of faith as you act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

VU Students Collaborate with LDA on Social Media

It started with a cup of coffee and a conversation – and developed into a fruitful, and fun, collaboration. Over the course of the fall 2022 semester, three talented and dynamic Valparaíso University students brought their collective insights to refresh and refocus the content on the LDA's social media platforms.

The student team – Rachel Dewitt, Katie Endres, and Nick Davis -- partnered with the LDA and another Valpo organization as part of their Senior Capstone Project for Communications, a course led by Professor Paul Oren. Each student brought her/his area of expertise, but together they teamed up to bring creative energy and good listening skills to weekly meetings with Deaconess Amy Smessaert, LDA Director of Development and Public Relations.

"I met Rachel during the LDA's Wednesday morning worship at the beginning of the semester," Amy said, "and that led to a conversation over coffee about the possibility of this project. It was a good fit from the beginning because the LDA was looking for input on our social media from a younger generation, and the students were eager to apply what they had learned at VU."

The dream team

While Rachel and Katie previously had collaborated on projects, they hadn't worked with Nick before. But, according to Rachel and Katie, his reputation and expertise preceded him. "We thought our skill sets would be a good match. Getting to do this as a group was a great perk," Rachel said.

"I didn't have to worry about this group," noted Nick. "We built a good rapport."

All three students will graduate from VU in May 2023. Nick, who has an established business, will earn a BA in digital media. Rachel, a Christ College student, will receive a BA in communications with a public relations focus, a second major in statistics, and a minor in Spanish. Katie will graduate with a BA in general communication with minors in cinema and media studies.

Rachel explained why the LDA was a draw for the project. "I started coming to the LDA's Wednesday morning worship services before COVID, and then COVID hit, and it fell off. But I remembered how much I loved being there – the people are cool and breakfast being served there is a bonus. I was passionate about the idea of this project being focused on the kind of people I met at worship. There was so much potential with the great public relations content that was already there. Professionally speaking, we knew it would be a great experience!"

"What attracted me," Nick said, "was the passion that Rachel shared about the LDA. Katie and Rachel brought both organizations forward (the LDA and the Hot Shop Valpo, a glassblowing studio). We agreed to take on both clients. Each has different needs, and we thought we could help each in the ways they needed."

For Katie, working with the LDA was an opportunity to build on her experience with not-for-profit organizations – she had worked with the Special Olympics previously. She was pleased to give back to the community.



Left to right, Valparaíso University students Nick Davis, Katie Endres, and Rachel Dewitt teamed up to offer their social media insights and expertise to the LDA as part of their Senior Capstone Project for Communications. During the fall 2022 semester, the students met weekly with Deaconess Amy Smessaert, LDA Director of Development and Public Relations.

Challenges and joys

Time was the biggest challenge the students encountered, especially with two clients. “It was definitely challenging,” Nick said, “managing time and setting aside time to complete tasks, and balancing things with other school projects, work, and extracurricular activities.”

“I kept feeling that what we were giving to our clients was not tangible – lots of conversation and brainstorming. I was trying to visualize what I was going to turn in,” explained Katie.

What made the challenges do-able, and even enjoyable, was that “we communicated well,” Rachel said. “We felt comfortable asking each other for help and extended grace to each other. It was a nice balance of give and take.”

Rachel, who brought her copy editing and analytics skills to bear on the LDA’s website, Facebook and Instagram platforms, served as the main contact between the team and Amy. “That was a smart structure for us,” Nick noted. “Rachel and Katie primarily did the client contact, and I was doing work behind the scenes.”

“I enjoyed the people aspect best – learning about the LDA and the people who are part of it,” said Katie, who focused on photo selection and copy editing.

Nick applied his digital media expertise to the LDA’s website. “It was a fun opportunity to do a longer term project,” he said. “Normally I have a quick turn around on projects. This was a good experiment for myself – to plan, execute, iterate, and edit.”

“I liked turning values and ideas into concrete steps, things you aspire to into an action plan,” Rachel said, “and learning to trust yourself, and gaining confidence.”

For Nick, a key learning was “not to put a lot of pressure on ourselves. The truest thing, the best thing, is being alive and making

connections with people.”

Katie shared how she dealt with the pressures of a big project. “For me, that translated into lessons in procrastination and time management. Just because it’s big and daunting doesn’t mean it’s impossible.”

“We figured this out together,” Amy said of the experience. “I was honest about what I didn’t know or understand, and the students respected that. I also shared the audiences who are engaged with the LDA and who we are trying to reach and for what purpose. Katie, Nick, and Rachel have outstanding listening and interpersonal skills – they heard what was important to the LDA and applied their excellent skill sets to our goals.”

What’s next

For the LDA, Amy has begun implementing the students’ recommendations which include: increase the LDA’s presence on Instagram; develop more stories on Facebook about the work deaconesses and deacons do; and on the website, rotate photos on the homepage, reduce scrolling, and use a new graphic treatment to highlight the 100 Years of Service stories.

As the students anticipate graduation, they are dreaming about the future. “I have a job offer waiting for me at an ad agency in North Carolina,” said Rachel. “I love helping people and being a partner and a support person. That suits me.”

Katie noted, “There are too many lives I would like to lead! But what’s important in anything I do is fostering and building good connections with people and working with my hands.”

“I want to help people bring dreams to reality, bring ideas to reality,” said Nick. “That’s what I feel my purpose is right now. That’s my dream.”

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LDA staff show off their LDA sweaters, polos, T-shirts, and a canvas tote bag. Left to right, Paula Katsahnias, Deaconess Barb Herzinger, and Deaconess Amy Smessaert.

Get Your LDA Gear On!

Whatever the weather or the season, there's LDA gear that's just right for you! There is a wide assortment of apparel, plus tote bags and other accessories. And the most fun part? Customizing the LDA logo in whatever colors you choose!

Check out the LDA's store at Land's End, conveniently located on our website at business.landsend.com/store/thelda/.

We'd love to see a photo of you wearing your gear!

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

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