



# LDA TODAY

Winter/Spring 2022

## Celebrating a Decade of Forming Men for Ministry

*In 2022, the LDA marks 10 years since it began forming men for diaconal ministry. This issue of LDA Today presents a few reflections and recollections on this milestone (see pages 1-3). And don't miss the pictures of the five consecrations over the past few months on pages 4-5!*

### "These are my brothers" — An interview with Deacon Steve Arnold

Deacon Steve Arnold, a long-time director of Christian education (DCE), spent years researching and advocating for a simpler, clearer, and more biblical expression of servant identity in the church. Eventually, his journey took him to Valparaiso, Indiana.

"I had this vision of deacons. I wondered, 'Can there be room in the LDA for a community of deacons?'" Steve said, recalling that initial meeting with LDA staff in 2002.

While there was some conversation about forming men for diaconal service, the timing was not quite right. So Steve continued in his ministry as director of the DCE program at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota, "restructuring the curriculum to make it more diaconal." He attended a two-week diaconal formation program through the ELCA at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Steve described the experience as "profound" because "it helped broaden my understanding of diaconal ministry and deepen my own diaconal identity so that I could do the internal work that I needed for reframing."

In the meantime, the LDA and the deaconess community continued to dialog and explore what it would look like to form men for



*LEFT: Members of the Community of Lutheran Deacons (CLD) at their 2021 Annual Meeting. Left to right, back row to front row: Deacon Student Galen Shriner, Deacon Steve Arnold; Deacon Student Jeff Hazewinkel, Deacon Andrew Stoebig, Deacon Student Brandon Kruger; Deacon Student Matthew Petersen, Deacon Elliott Stephenson.*

*RIGHT: Deacon Andrew Stoebig, President of the CLD, enjoys community time with Deaconess Jan Janzow at the 2021 CLD Annual Meeting.*



diaconal service and to develop a men's community. And in 2012, a process was approved by the LDA Board of Directors.

#### Formation begins

Steve, who had stayed in touch with the LDA, was "absolutely excited" about the news. "I went into the process of formation with Ben (Ema) and Elliott (Stephenson)."

These first men in formation also were nurtured at the home of Karl and Gail Lutze, a place that Steve affectionately calls "the motherhouse of the Deacon Community."

"Karl and Gail were just amazing people. Living in that home, filled with love and acceptance, it was a good place to foster community," Steve said. "Ben, Elliott, and I stayed there during Student Seminar. Something about having to live together really shapes community. For the three of us, who have vastly different personalities, it was a very good experience. Living together also produces irritation, and yet, there was a common bond that was stronger than that irritation."

*continued on p. 3*



# Executive Director's Corner

## MARKING MILESTONES: Forming the men's community

Dear friends,

In 1979, the question was asked, "Shouldn't the diaconate include men? Have men been given the idea that they are not welcome in the diaconate?"\*

That first question floated around my mind for nearly 25 years as I was fortunate enough to do ministry with many, many men who had hearts for serving God's people. Men whose call seemed, to me, to fit with the diaconate more than ordination.

That first question resonated with me as I welcomed our first three male students to their first Seminar after many decades of conversation in the LDA. Ten years ago, this spring, Ben Ema, Elliott Stephenson, and Steve Arnold walked into the Center for Diaconal Ministry as our first three deacon students. One deaconess student said, "Being in the student community with both women and men broadened my own understanding about diaconal ministry while also debunking an unconscious assumption: Men who are called to serve as an LDA deacon have the same hearts for Christian service as my deaconess sisters do. Furthermore, their presence led to a richer student community while I was a student."

That first question was resoundingly answered with a "YES!" as I stood at the consecration of our newest deacon, Matthew Petersen, in January. Surrounded by LDA Deaconesses and Deacons, Matthew officially became a part of our 103-year-old diaconate. When I asked him, "Do you desire to be consecrated, to enter the diaconate, and to serve wherever God leads you?" Matthew responded enthusiastically, "Yes, with the help of God!"

Matthew now becomes the seventh deacon consecrated by the LDA. He joins a long line of LDA deaconesses and deacons, all the way back to our first deaconess, Ina Kempff, who was consecrated 100 years ago.

And, speaking of Ina, I was privileged to attend the funeral of Ina's son, Walter (Jim) Meyer, in February. Jim was a longtime supporter of the LDA, and I had the privilege of visiting with him and his late wife Ellen several years ago in Florida. They shared many pictures of Ina doing ministry in her early days as a deaconess. Jim and Ellen also had servant hearts, and we give thanks for them.

I invite your reflection on these milestones in the diaconate as we continue preparing and supporting the whole people of God in Christ's call to serve in our second century of service.

Faith and service in Christ,

Deaconess Lisa S. Polito, Executive Director



Grave of Deaconess Ina Kempff Meyer and Walter Meyer

\*Report on "Milwaukee Study Consultation," March 10, 1979

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The diaconal call is universal to all who follow Jesus, who taught us to walk in the way of humble service. For those called to set-apart diaconal ministry, our work, our mutual support, and our diaconal presence is wider, deeper, and richer when barriers to diversity are removed. I'm proud of the LDA taking the initiative to provide education and formation to men as well as women. I am blessed to be a part of this season of growth for both the women's and men's communities.

—Deaconess Janet Conrady, President, Lutheran Deaconess Conference, on the LDA's 10th anniversary of forming men for ministry

### Community of Lutheran Deacons – then and now

"I remember one of our annual conferences that was held in my basement," Steve said. "We slept in sleeping bags and I did the cooking. We did a lot of searching and exploring about our life together in the diaconate. Now, we are at a point where we're maturing as a community."

He commended Deacon Andrew Stoebig, President of the Community of Lutheran Deacons (CLD), for his leadership. "Andrew has really taken the reins as president and is taking us to the next level. We're laying a good foundation for the community," he said.

The CLD comprises seven consecrated deacons and six students. There is a 50-year age range, from 24 to 74. "I'm the oldest deacon, and at times I feel like I'm the grandfather!" said Steve. "I'm stepping out of leadership to lift up the younger leaders. For me that's how this community works."

"We are a very supportive community. These are my brothers," Steve continued, adding that the community meets every Monday to pray the Diaconal Litany, share prayer concerns, and connect about life via phone, email, and Zoom. "It really is the Litany that helps shape our community; we are not always aware of how shaping it is. The more we're together in community, the richer that community life becomes for me. It's an amazing group of men."

## Reflections from the Lutze "Motherhouse"

*Longtime LDA supporter Gail Lutze remembers when the first men in the education/formation program gathered at the Lutze home after long days in Student Seminar at the Center for Diaconal Ministry. There were many late-night conversations with Gail and her husband Karl. Here are her reflections.*



I remember some of the guys would get together at our place to talk. It was always something we looked forward to. The first of the men was Steve Arnold and then Ben Ema and Elliott Stephenson, and later Andrew Stoebig and Jack Walter. They would be at the LDA and then stay overnight at our house. We didn't see them all day long. Sometimes they'd come back at 10 p.m. and then we would talk with them over a glass of wine.

What I remember most is the kindness, the incredible kindness, of the men involved in the beginning – the way they listened to each other and gave so much support to each other. Karl and I both were struck by this, and seeing this helped convince me that this (the men's community) was a good thing and needed to be happening.

### Intentional community

If you take those first five or six men, there were not many similarities between them. If you had gone out and looked for a group of men, you wouldn't have put them together. But the strong bond and similarity found in their love for each other and for others, and in their intentionality about what they were doing, created this incredible community. Although I had known about discernment before, watching the guys go through that – where they needed to be individually and as a group – it was clear that what they had in common was so precious. The dedication and amount of time they were willing to invest in this



LEFT: Gail Lutze ABOVE: Members of the Community of Lutheran Deacons surround Karl Lutze after designating him an Honorary Deacon shortly before his death in 2015. Left to right: Ben Ema, David Rojas Martínez, Karl, Steve Arnold.

effort, over and above other things in their lives, it's quite a commitment!

As their host, what we received from the guys was just inspiring. They drew us in and made us welcome. They all expressed thankfulness for our presence and support. Karl and I benefited so much from being with them. Karl was made an Honorary Deacon before he died, and the community was there. It was so beautiful.

### Growth and connection

When I see that another deacon has been consecrated, even if I don't know him, I find it so hopeful that other men are having the opportunity to make this decision to be able to join the community. Community – it's such an important word for me. It keeps us going. Community can be hard to define, but it is very intentional; it is not happenstance. Community binds us together.

*Gail continues to stay connected with members of the deacon community through Facebook, email, and personal visits.*



# Consecrations

## Rejoice and be glad: Consecrations abound!

### DEACON GALEN SHRINER

**Consecrated:** October 10, 2021, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Wichita, Kansas

**Ministry:** Music and Physical Education Teacher at St. Patrick Catholic School, Wichita; Assistant Music Director at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church



PHOTOS: Deacon Student Jeff Hazewinkel

**What I Remember:** "What stands out was having members of the CLD and the LDC there to celebrate with me, and the feeling of completion that I felt. The journey toward consecration was a time of growth in my spirituality and a challenge to my concept of ministry. I see my consecration not so much a completion of a goal, but more of a beginning of my ministry."

### DEACON MATTHEW PETERSEN

**Consecrated:** January 16, 2022, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Reading, Ohio

**Ministry:** Chaplain Resident at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Cincinnati, Ohio



PHOTOS: Jacob Osterbur and Deacon Student Jeff Hazewinkel

**What I Remember:** "Deacon Andrew Stoebig was a great help in creating a service that was intentional and authentic to me. It was a blessing to have people travel to be a part of the service, even in the midst of the Omicron spike, as well as to have so many attend via the livestream. I was very moved when the deaconesses, deacons, and pastors prayed for me through the laying on of hands."



## DEACONESS JULIE PERALTA

Consecrated: March 19, 2022, New Smyrna Beach, Florida | Ministry: CPE Resident, AdventHealth, Orlando, Florida



**What I Remember:** "The walk on the beach before and observing the sunrise. Being surrounded by a small intimate group. One wedding dress, 1 formal, 1 baptismal gown, 1 confirmation banner, 1 suit jacket, 5 stoles, 8 T-shirts, 10 bandanas: When you add it all up, you get one amazing deacon stole that holds memories and will be cherished for a lifetime. Finally, the breezes from the ocean, a reminder of not only the Holy Spirit's presence but of those who were not physically present."

## DEACONESS CARRIE SOVOLA

Consecrated: April 2, 2022, Griffith Lutheran Church, Griffith, Indiana

Ministry: Mission & Outreach Deaconess, Griffith Lutheran Church



PHOTOS: Deacon Student Jeff Hazewinkel

**What I Remember:** "It was a blessing to have so many from the deaconess and deacon communities present. I specifically remember the joyfulness that stirred me after hearing the chorus, 'We will, and we ask God to help us!' during the Acceptance of the Communities."

## DEACONESS LAURA SHARP-WAITES

Consecrated: April 9, 2022, New Life Chapel, The Heritage at Lowman, Chapin, South Carolina

Ministry: Pastoral Counselor at LauraSW.Com, Newberry, South Carolina, and online



**What I Remember:** "Being surrounded by family, friends, my favorite pastor, my spiritual director, the Bishop of the ELCA South Carolina Synod, and deaconesses locally and online made the day special. Being at the Heritage at Lowman meant so much to me because of the Valpo connection (the design was based on the Chapel of the Resurrection) and it was where I completed my CPE. The most meaningful thing was the prayers for me during the laying on of hands."

## Following Christ, Serving in a Pandemic

*As the world adjusts and transitions from the COVID-19 pandemic, our deaconesses, deacons, and students continue to serve on the front lines and beyond, discerning and reshaping their ministries in compassionate service to God's suffering people. Here is a glimpse into the lives and ministries of two members of our community who told their story of faith and service to LDA Today.*



### DEACONESS RAYANNE WOODRUFF

*"When I see the kids making connections and learning – kids who likely would be cast off or disregarded in a traditional school setting – to be part of this process is amazing!"*

**Rayanne is a Neuroeducational Specialist at Excel Christian Academy and Preschool, Lakeland, Florida.**

What drew me to the LDA is their perspective that one's vocation and the role of a deaconess are integrated. That approach fits with my vocation, which is multifaceted. I am a Neuroeducational Specialist serving in a Christian school. As a licensed speech and language pathologist, I work with youth who have cognitive disabilities, am the high school Bible teacher, and the unofficial staff chaplain.

Even before the pandemic, I noticed that the students in my third grade classroom seemed to be developing differently from those in previous generations, with an increase in learning disabilities, learning differences, ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder), ASD (autism spectrum disorder), anxiety, and other social/emotional disturbances.

The youngest generations also are play deprived. The kids didn't know how to play with or interact with each other. Students aren't developing cognitive linguistic skills, especially the academic and cognitive stimulation that occurs face-to-face. They are not learning conflict resolution, negotiation, and how to manage their upset.

#### Play lab

My school is what I call "brain friendly" – receptive to a creative approach to learning based on students' unique needs. With their support, I implemented a play lab to help address learning challenges, which were exacerbated by COVID. Play lab is a 45-minute period, offered one to three times a week to students from kindergarten through grade five. We sit on the floor in a community circle and focus on social/emotional learning. We talk about questions such as, "Do we always have to share?" Then the students have free play, with various activity choices.

The play lab is now in its third year, and we're seeing how it is teaching the kids how to be a class community. When I see the kids making connections and learning – kids who likely would be cast off

or disregarded in a traditional school setting – to be part of this process is amazing!

The academy's culture is community oriented. We have six core values: honor, creativity, generosity, excellence, diversity, and growth. In the Bible classes I teach, we use our images of diaconal service (foot washer, table server, storyteller, doorkeeper/go-between, and bearer of the light) to give students a broad, creative framework for their spiritual development.

#### Ministry support

My goal for next year is to expand our student support services therapies. This would provide options that most underserved populations do not have access to, including activities to re-tune overactive neural systems. I am very grateful to have my ministry chosen as one of the mission projects that will be supported at this year's annual meeting of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference. I would not have been able to do this job as well as I have if I had not gone through the LDA's process of education and formation. I've learned about the importance of flexibility, especially since I'm a Type A personality. I needed to get out of God's way and let God take control.

I am working on my doctorate in educational leadership with a focus on special education and a case study on the play lab – how teachers' views on play have changed and how students are learning socially and emotionally. It's totally a God thing, how all this has played out. God has led this process, step-by-step.

I'm in a place where I'm doing exactly what God is telling me to do. I'm not sure where all this is going, but I keep moving forward. I would appreciate the community's continued prayers for me as I deal with chronic health issues and maintain a focus on gratitude.





## DEACON ELLIOTT STEPHENSON

*"I refocused my energy on the journey that lies immediately ahead, rather than worrying about what may or may not be possible next year."*

Elliott is currently an Audio Engineer aboard the Celebrity Apex cruise ship, which has a European itinerary until December of 2022. He just transitioned from a position as a School Counselor at Ignite Christian Academy, an online school, where he worked with students on academic skillsets, college and career planning, and social-emotional development.

For me, change is good. At the beginning of 2020, I was an Audio Engineer for a live event production company in South Florida. When March hit, we watched the entire entertainment industry crumble around us: No more concerts, weddings, conferences, theatrical shows, or cruise ships – everything simply stopped.

Shortly afterward, I moved back to Missouri to be closer to my family during the pandemic. My Master's degree is in Counseling Psychology, so I was able to pick up a school counseling position in a rural school district in western Missouri. I continually struggled to discern what was next, but I felt that any move I made could be compromised by COVID.

After much discernment, and a lengthy period of interviews and applications, I accepted a position as an Online School Counselor with Ignite Christian Academy in early August 2021. I purchased an RV shortly afterward, and began traveling all across the Southern and Western United States – working during the week, and exploring on the weekends. During that time, I visited nine national parks, numerous cities and states I had never experienced, and encountered many new people, cultures, and ideas along the way.

While constant domestic travel was certainly filling my desire to 'go' and to 'explore', I was anticipating the day when international travel opportunities would finally be a safe and viable option. Celebrity Cruise Lines reached out in the spring of 2022 to see if I would be interested in an audio engineering opportunity on one of their ships in Europe. After a time of careful consideration, I chose to make yet another transition back onto ships. I flew into Amsterdam on June 3, and I have been on board the Celebrity Apex ever since.

### Faith and service

What does this mean? I continue to stumble upon and embrace this concept: I have no idea what I want; I am in constant discernment. COVID made significant long-term planning exceptionally challenging for everyone; so, to cope, I refocused my energy on the journey that lies immediately ahead, rather than worrying about what may or may not be possible next year.

My faith and call to diaconal service is consistently strengthened through my work with people. Deacons and deaconesses serve everywhere – in the church, the classroom, the courtroom, and yes, even on the cruise ship. It turns out that no matter where I am or what I am doing, there are still people who are hurting, who are yearning for understanding (or to be understood), who are contemplating their spirituality and their greater purpose in the world. To be diaconal is to meet people exactly where they are at – and with the nature of my job(s), I meet people absolutely everywhere.

### Community and hope

As the world begins to reopen, it seems that both proactive and reactive discernment are happening all around us. We are working through the great resignation, human rights violations, financial inflation, political fluctuation, and even international war.

In these difficult times, deacons and deaconesses across the world are consistently bringing hope, compassion, and presence into very broken places. We are shaping the world around us in ways that we may never fully realize, and certainly in ways that may never attain formal recognition – but we do it anyway.

Brothers and sisters, thank you for all that you continue to do for your local, regional, and global neighbors in the midst of unprecedented transition and discernment. Thank you for meeting people where they're at, and humbly walking with them on their individual journeys.

*Jesus, suffering savior and praying priest,  
Empower us by patient bearing of injuries to spread  
the peace of your cross;  
By steadfast endurance, without envy or  
resentment, to demonstrate your victory;  
By steady and faithful prayer to carry our neighbor  
into your gracious presence.*

*-excerpt, The Diaconal Litany*

# LDA Staff Changes

## Goodbyes and Hellos



*LEFT: Deaconess Valerie Webdell, left, receives a certificate recognizing her eight years of service as the LDA's Co-Director of Education and Formation. Deaconess Lisa Polito, LDA Executive Director, made the presentation at the Board of Directors meeting in April. CENTER: Deaconess Adrainne Gray, LDA Director of Recruitment. RIGHT: Deaconess Barb Herzinger, LDA Co-Director of Education and Formation. PHOTO CREDITS: Left to right: Deacon Student Jeff Hazewinkel; Ben Gray; Laura Venstrom*

April signaled several staff changes at the LDA. We said farewell to Deaconess Valerie Webdell and welcomed Deaconesses Barb Herzinger and Adrainne Gray.

Barb, Co-Director of Education and Formation (CO-DEF), spent a couple of weeks learning the ins and outs of the job with Valerie. Valerie, who served as CO-DEF for eight years, left her position to relocate to Maryland and live closer to family. We are grateful for Valerie's gifts and ministry to the LDA. The LDA Board of Directors and staff hosted a farewell celebration for Valerie to thank her for her contributions, service, and presence among us.

Consecrated in 1993, Barb comes to us with significant experience in youth and family ministry. She served for nine years as Director of Youth and Family Ministry at Trinity Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, Indiana. Her first diaconal call was to Immanuel Lutheran Church, Michigan City, Indiana, where she served 18 years as a parish deaconess/youth minister. She also served on the LDA's Admission and Services & Renewal committees and on the Lutheran Deaconess Conference Board as both president and secretary.

Barb works from the Center for Diaconal Ministry in Valparaiso and is collaborating with Deaconess Debra Lennox, CO-DEF, to guide the formation and education process for the LDA's 24 diaconal students. Barb and Deb paired up on the June 2022 Student Seminar, the first in-person Seminar since the pandemic began more than two years ago.

Adrainne also joined the staff in April, in the new position of Director of Recruitment. She was consecrated in 2017 in Jerusalem, and brings a wealth of communications experience with an international perspective. After serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land as Communications Coordinator, Adrainne joined the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) as Communication Officer for Communion Relations. She continues to work remotely with the LWF in the United States, and spends 35 to 40 hours a month working for the LDA, with a primary focus on diversity recruitment.

Read more about Barb and Adrainne on LDA's website at <https://thelda.org/explore/#staff>.





## 2022 Phonathon: You did it again!

Thanks to you, we had another successful Phonathon this year! Most of the LDA's 40+ volunteer callers gathered in person to make calls, while others phoned from their homes. Our dedicated callers reached out to more than 650 donors – to see how they were doing, gather over 120 prayer requests, update them on the good things going on at the LDA, and thank them for their support. More than \$156,000 was raised to help the LDA continue in its mission to form, send, and nurture communities of deaconesses and deacons in a Lutheran context to serve in all walks of life. We are grateful!



LEFT: LDA Staff launch into a slightly altered musical rendition of "Hooked on a Feeling" during a celebration of Mark Elgert's service as President of the LDA Board of Directors. RIGHT: Outgoing LDA Board President Mark Elgert feigns surprise when presented with a gift of an LDA coffee mug.

PHOTOS: Deacon Student Jeff Hazewinkel

## April 2022 LDA Board Meeting Highlights

We thank outgoing Board President Mark Elgert for his dedicated service to the LDA, especially his leadership during the pandemic.

### Election of Officers

- Deaconess Jean Warren, President
- Michael Steffen, Vice President
- Chuck Denninger, Treasurer
- Julie Lehmann, Secretary

### Installation of New Members

- Layman - Keith Williams

### Re-Installation of Re-elected Members

- Laywoman - Julie Lehmann
- Pastor - Amy Schiffrin
- Deaconess - Jean Warren

### Student Liaisons

- Deaconess Student - Lisa Swayne
- Deacon Student - Jeff Hazewinkel

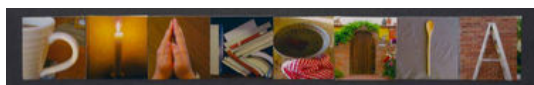
### Approved for Consecration

- Deaconess Student Amy Smessaert

## CONNECT WITH US



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*TOP: Diaconal artwork designed by Deaconess Sarah Fertig-Johnson. This piece of alphabet art uses the five diaconal images of table waiting, light bearing, storytelling, foot washing, and door keeping to spell out diakonia.*

*BOTTOM: Deaconess Lisa Polito, LDA Executive Director, left, and Deaconess Edie Eickemeyer, of the Servant Ministry Support Committee, right, present the Young Heart for Service award certificate and diaconal artwork to Maggie Haite on December 19, 2021, at Luther Memorial Church of Chicago.*

## A Young Heart for Service

After several COVID and other delays, we were thrilled to finally present Maggie Haite of Luther Memorial Church of Chicago with the LDA's Young Heart for Service award! The award honors a young person who practices diaconal ministry in their own life, their community, and their congregation. Maggie received a certificate and a diaconal artwork from the LDA.

And Maggie's heart for service is exceptional. At Luther Memorial, Maggie has served as a Sunday School teacher; youth representative to the council; and assisting minister, lector, and acolyte in worship. Maggie also has played guitar with the praise band.

While in high school, Maggie was engaged in a wide variety of advocacy groups and the theater community, as well as care for creation. The latter led Maggie to study at the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Michigan State University.

Deaconess Claire Schoepp said this in her nomination of Maggie for the award: "Maggie is a people person – the kind of person who cares very deeply for everyone and genuinely wants to know how you are when asked. Maggie notices things and takes action where others might not act or notice."

Congratulations, Maggie!

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