

Overview & Synopsis

In the Footsteps of Phoebe: A Complete History of the Deaconess Movement in The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

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Overview

In the Footsteps of Phoebe utilizes primary source materials to document the deaconess movement within the LCMS from its earliest days until 2009. The subject and content of the book serve to fill a significant gap in the annals of synodical history, which have thus far never recorded the thoughts and actions of female church workers during some of the most turbulent times in the Synod's history.

As the story of the deaconess movement unfolds, the reader is impressed by how it overlaps with the stories of so many other synodical interests – the LCMS Board for Missions, Board for Higher Education, and Board of Directors; the Lutheran Women's Missionary League; the Walther League; Lutheran nurses and Lutheran hospitals; scores of Lutheran congregations and institutions; Radio Station KFZO; Valparaiso University; the Concordia University System; countless elected synodical officials, and so on.

Far from being a dry account of dates, names, and places, *In the Footsteps of Phoebe* oozes with insights about deaconess identity, the importance of God's Word, and the concepts of sisterhood, vocation, consecration, and a servant's heart.

Synopsis

From 1919 to 1979, the Lutheran Deaconess Association (LDA), an autonomous organization that held membership in Associated Lutheran Charities, trained women to serve as deaconesses in the Synodical Conference and the Missouri Synod. Graduates of LDA deaconess schools gave faithful service to hospitals, missions, and congregations of the Synod, where they engaged in a *ministry of mercy* that complemented the pastoral office - the *ministry of Word and Sacraments*.

The professional identity and role of deaconesses in the church evolved as the LDA sought to keep in step with changes in American society. When doctrinal disputes erupted within the Missouri Synod from the mid-twentieth century onward, members of the LDA, those who educated deaconess students on behalf of the LDA, and the Lutheran Deaconess Conference, increasingly embraced theological positions contrary to orthodox Lutheran teaching. Many members of the Missouri Synod became disenchanted with the LDA and its training program, concluding that the Synod should assume responsibility for educating its own deaconesses. The LCMS needed to train its own deaconesses to ensure faithfulness in their teaching, leadership, and service.

In 1979, the Missouri Synod authorized its Board for Higher Education to direct Concordia College, River Forest, Ill., to establish a full deaconess training program on its campus by the fall of 1980, and in 2001, the Synod sanctioned additional training programs at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. In 1980, nine deaconesses founded the Concordia Deaconess Conference – Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, to aid the Synod in “upholding and promoting deaconess service,” and to “provide opportunity for spiritual, professional and personal growth and fellowship” for deaconesses of the Synod.

Today, Missouri Synod deaconesses continue to dedicate their lives to a *ministry of mercy*, at institutions, in congregations and schools, on synodical boards and committees, and in the home and foreign mission fields of the Synod.