

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PHOEBE



# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PHOEBE

A COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE DEACONESS MOVEMENT  
IN THE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

CHERYL D. NAUMANN



Peer Reviewed

In loving memory of  
Deaconess Clara Else Flora Strehlow:  
a humble servant of the Lord,  
our mentor and encourager



Peer Reviewed

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## THE DEACONESS

No regal robe of state she wears  
    In service of her Lord the King;  
Clad in the simplest garb, she bears  
    His grace unto the suffering.

'Tis hers the troubled mind to calm,  
    The fever-parched lip to cool,  
Apply the mild assuasive balm  
    To wounded flesh or sin-sick soul.

Self finds no room within her breast,  
    Her every thought, another's needs;  
With tender touch she soothes to rest,  
    Whilst softly unto Heaven she pleads.

Mercy and peace upon her smile.  
    The pitying Lord her prayer attends;  
Hers is a holy joy, the while  
    His blessing on her path descends.

Though poor of earth, a countless store  
    Of wealth is hers, through Christ's own blood;  
His messenger, she asks no more  
    Than faithfully to serve her Lord.

*Mary Weldon*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Deaconess," *The Lutheran Deaconess* 19, no.2 (April 1942): 2.

## FOREWORD

The office of deaconess is an ancient and honorable one in the Christian Church. Its roots go back to apostolic days. In Romans 16:1, the apostle Paul mentions Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, a Greek city close to Corinth. Paul writes that Phoebe has been a great help to many, including himself. She was most likely the person chosen to carry the great apostle's letter to the church at Rome. Paul instructs the church at Rome to receive Phoebe "in the Lord and in a way worthy of the saints" and to give her whatever she needed to carry out her important work.

Lutheran deaconess history has its roots in the *innere mission* movement in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a response to the need for dedicated Christian women to bring aid to the widows, orphans, the sick, and the disadvantaged in the days of the industrial revolution. This deaconess ministry was soon transplanted to the United States in the early days of what we today call The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Deaconess Naumann tells the story of the early days of deaconess ministry in North America; its connection with Missouri Synod congregations and Lutheran Hospital in Fort Wayne, Indiana; the deaconess motherhouse; Bethesda (in Watertown, Wisconsin); and other institutions. She traces the history of the Lutheran Deaconess Association and its leaders, the training of deaconesses at Valparaiso University, and the building of Deaconess Hall. The author then relates the involvement of deaconesses in the days of the doctrinal controversy in the LCMS in the 1960s and 1970s.

The author describes the Synod's relationship with the deaconess movement from the days when deaconesses were trained by a separate, independent association to the present when the LCMS has established an official deaconess training program in its schools and recognizes deaconesses as commissioned ministers of the Church. *In the Footsteps of Phoebe* tells the stirring story of how a small group of deaconesses led the LCMS to a closer relationship with the office and the dedicated women whose historic motto is "Let us not be weary in well doing."

This writer has had the privilege of knowing and working with many of these dedicated servants of the Lord and His Church. The Lutheran deaconess is an office that has been a blessing to our Synod over the years.

However, it is a resource that many have not yet come to appreciate. Whether functioning as a nurse, a social worker, a worker in the mission fields, or as a parish assistant to a pastor in a congregation, the Lutheran deaconess is a great resource for the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The author of this volume, Deaconess Cheryl D. Naumann, is herself an experienced and distinguished deaconess. She has served as deaconess in many roles and also as author and editor of several publications. She is a founding member of the Concordia Deaconess Conference. Her book includes much original material that is not available elsewhere. It is well documented with a rich bibliography. It is a literary work that combines interesting reading with important church history and first-class scholarship.

It is my prayer that this volume will bring about an increased realization of the potential of women to serve our Lord and His Church, even as did Phoebe in the days of the apostle Paul.

Paul A. Zimmerman