

The ELCA Deaconess Community is one of the best kept secrets of our churchwide ministries! I was not aware of it until attending seminary and enrolling in a January class sponsored by the Deaconess Community to educate seminarians about the history of Diakonia. Diakonia is a Greek word meaning “service” or “ministry.” This word is used in the Christian tradition to describe the care and service we offer to one another and to those in need. One of our ELCA Deacons describes it as the “Gospel on the streets.” Because diakonia bridges the church and world, the church does not exist without diakonia!

A candidate who feels called to “Word and Service” and not “Word and Sacrament,” works to be an ELCA deacon and not an ELCA pastor. Both of these calls are ordained in our church body and considered “rostered ministers” of the ELCA. If a candidate identifies as female and would like to be a part of an intentional community of ELCA Deacons, she completes more formation opportunities and may be consecrated to the office of Deaconess. The ELCA Deaconess Community uses the title of “Sister,” so I go by “Sister D’Etta Broam,” but “Deacon D’Etta Broam” is also correct.

The ELCA Deaconess Community also serves the ELCIC (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada). The community currently has 65 Sisters representing 30 different ministries across 20 states of US and 4 provinces of Canada. The community is self-governed with a board of directors and five paid staff members: Directing Deaconess, Finance and Operations Manager, Marketing and Communications Manager, Strategic Mission and Interpretation Manager, and Program Administrator. The community currently has six committees to complete the mission and vision of the ELCA Deaconess Community.

The vision of the Deaconess Community is what attracted me to this community: “Compelled by the love of Christ and sustained by community, the Deaconess Community of the ELCA works for justice and the flourishing for all of God’s creation.” The first seven women came to America to serve in 1884, so the Deaconess Community is 142 years old! These original deaconesses were trained in Kaiserwerth, Germany at the school Pastor Theodor Fliedner and his wife, Friederike Munster Fliedner, established in 1836 for Deaconess Training. Today our deaconesses work as parish workers, attorneys, social workers, chaplains, teachers, nurses, nurse practitioners, health and wellness workers, and synod staff members. In our SC Synod, we have three deaconesses: Sister Marilyn Stauffer, retired archivist with ELCA Archives, Sister Carol Burk, retired from work with Augsburg Fortress, and me, Sister D’Etta Broam, a contract member of the SC Synod Staff for Health and Wholeness ministries.

Thanks for the opportunity to share about The Deaconess Community ELCA. If you would like information about the Mission Grants sponsored by the Deaconess Community or any other information, please contact me at dbroam@gmail.com or 803-463-6255. Peace and Blessings be with you all. God is always with us!