

# Making Christ Known

in the



**Northern Illinois Synod**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

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## Thank You, Deacons!

*[Christ's] purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13, CEB)*

In this issue of *Making Christ Known* we are highlighting the ministries of deacons, our Ministers of Word and Service. The lay rosters of this church were combined in 2017. Those who had been serving as associates in ministry, diaconal ministers and ELCA deaconesses are now known as deacons.

In the Northern Illinois Synod, we have 18 deacons, five of whom are retired. A majority of our deacons serve or have served congregations as musicians or directors of music. Across the church, however, deacons serve in many different capacities. Deacon Karin Graddy, for example, serves on my staff as our synod's Director of Communication and liaison for youth ministries. Deacon Cheryl Erdmann works with me as a full-time assistant to the bishop.

## A History of Deacons

*Deacon Cheryl Erdmann*

Deacon. That is a word that may be familiar to you - or may not. The word has been used within the Christian Church to describe many different positions in the congregation, the wider denominations and even a category of professional ministry. In my own experience of church life, "deacon" has meant an appointed position in a congregation similar

to a congregation council position; a position in a congregation associated with hospitality and greeting; and, in its feminine form, "deaconess," a called Lutheran lay professional.

At the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, after several years of study and decades of conversation, the Assembly voted to create a single category of professional ministry out

of the three previous lay categories (in ELCA language, "rosters"). This roster was called "minister of Word and Service." The title for those on this roster was to be "Deacon." There is much history in the use of these words "minister of Word and Service" and "deacon." There's not time here to go too deeply into this history but let me give a brief explanation.

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*Bishop and Paulette Clements share a meal with deacons at the Professional Leaders Conference*

As you read the stories of a few of our deacons, I hope you will help me affirm their work among us. Our lives are richer, more mature, because each one of them answered God's call to a public ministry.

Thank you, deacons!

Walking with you,

Bishop Jeff Clements

## Deacon Myrna Andersen

I served the LCA and the ELCA as a Director of Church Music for 36 years before retiring. I have a Masters of Sacred Music degree so I knew my call was to lay ministry in the church. I appreciate the opportunity to have served as a rostered Associate in Ministry and now a retired Deacon in the ELCA.



## Deacon Jean Anderson

My work in the church in music ministry has been a joy over the years. Being rostered as a deacon has been important because of the support I feel from the synod and the bishop, as well as working alongside other deacons and ordained pastors. It has helped me with my understanding in preparing music to accompany worship to the glory of God. I officially retired as a deacon a year and a half ago, the same time that I began my new ministry as organist/pianist at Trinity Lutheran in Rockford! I thoroughly enjoy this new role, setting my own schedule and staying as long as I want to practice the organ!



## Deacon Marti Bein

Called to Our Savior's, Rockford in September 2012 to serve as Director of Worship and Music, my primary focus is to design worship and oversee the music and musicians who lead worship. *Other* comprises a lot of my position. Other might mean administrative work, running sound or screens. Other also includes teaching preschool music, Sunday School music,



Youth Gathering and mission trips with High School Youth, or serving in Honduras with other OSLC members and friends. I feel called to be a relationship-builder, between people and, more importantly, between people and God.

## Deacon Cheryl Erdmann

I was consecrated as a deaconess of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, Valparaiso, IN, in 2000 and commissioned as an ELCA Associate in Ministry in 2001. Prior to entering Candidacy and the LDA education/formation process, I lived out my baptism as a layperson in my congregations of membership and had several careers - as a corporate telecommunications analyst, an instructor in economics in several community colleges and in volunteer recruitment at a Lutheran Eldercare agency. My first call was to Bethany Lutheran Church, Crystal Lake, as the Director of Education and Family Ministry. I also served during that time as a Conference Assistant on the NIS staff. My current call is as Assistant to Bishop Clements with responsibilities for Candidacy, Special Events Planning, Administration and "other duties as assigned."



## Deacon Jennifer Fox

My title at Christ Lutheran, Belvidere is Director of Music and Worship. My call is a half-time position. I am responsible for all worship planning which includes selecting the liturgies and all music in the services. I also work with the pastors on special events, overall worship themes and the designs of the liturgical seasons. I schedule and coordinate all musicians for worship services as well as direct the choirs. I also play the piano for all worship services.



I have been an Associate in Ministry for over 30 years and feel that serving the church in this way is extremely important.

Outside of church, I teach music in the Dakota School District. I teach K-12 with a very extensive music program.

## Deacon Janet Johnson

I have been a church worker since 1973, in addition to teaching in the Rock Island Public School system. I was commissioned as a Lay Professional of the Lutheran Church in America, April 11, 1987. With the formation of the



ELCA my title was changed to Associate in Ministry and am now titled a Deacon of Word and Service.

I served 10 years at St. John's, Rock Island, developing and leading the Neighborhood Activity program, then became the Adult Choir and Children's Choir Director adding VBS Music Director to my responsibilities.

In 1986 I was hired as the Adult Choir and Children's Music Director at First, Moline. This expanded to include VBS Music Director and Director of Sunday Church School. In 2004 I retired and remain an active member at First, Moline.

In my work I served with dedicated pastors and church organists in worship planning. I thoroughly enjoyed studying the appointed lessons, searching out, teaching and directing others in performing music to enhance God's Word through music in worship. My heart and soul are truly dedicated to, and fed by church work.

## Deacon Carol Ann Ostrom

When I was 12 years old, my Grandfather, a United church of Christ Pastor, said "Of my 13 grandchildren I think you Carol should carry on the Lord's work through your music ministry." I took him seriously and continued my piano, organ, harpsichord, and vocal study at Lawrence and Capital Universities graduating with a Music Degree. I have held church organist positions at Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational and Lutheran services; Organist at Midway Village Service 1992-2006; Staff accompanist at Rock Valley College 1980-2018 but still teaching applied piano lessons. I began my current position as organist of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in 1964 to the present, Also organist at Rockford University



1992-present

In 1970 I was certified as a Church Musician of L.C.A. In 1978 I was a resource person to the introducing of the Lutheran Book of Worship. In 1988 I became an associate in ministry being installed in 2001. Now 2018 as a Deacon Minister of Word and Service. During my 54 years as organist of Gloria Dei, I have worked with 14 Pastors, 12 music Directors, played on 9 different keyboards, and used 5 hymnals. As long as my brain and fingers work, I plan to continue making music for the Lord's work.

## Deacon Shari Trotter

I serve as Deacon at Peace Lutheran Church in New Lenox. I am called there to serve both in their programmatic life and their liturgical life. I preach once a month and assist with the



liturgy every week, but my most treasured call to Peace is to work with the youth of the congregation. I was called to be a Deacon because serving alongside people in the dirt of their life is where God moves and uses my gifts. With these youth (and adults), I have been privileged to see God do transformative things in their lives and in their faith.

## Deacon Carla Vanatta

My ministry with Salem Lutheran includes worship planning, pastoral care, and program support. I direct adult and children's choirs, Salem's Puppet Praise Ministry, and play handbells. Ron and I have been privileged



to work with Salem congregation since college and begin our 43rd creative arts season. I love team ministry with Salem staff and Pastor and enjoy seeing children, youth, and adults grow in faith, service, and wonder at God's good gifts. Recently I accepted a new challenge as Mission Developer of Genoa Intersections and will begin our first small group study Sept. 17.

In Acts 6, as the early Church grew, the apostles realized that they could no longer provide, by themselves, all the leadership needed in the Church. Specifically, they found that they could not oversee the areas of hands-on care of the needy in the congregation while also preaching and teaching. They came to the decision to appoint faith-filled members that they believed had the gifts for what we would now call social ministry to fill this need. The term used for these newly appointed leaders, translated into English from the original Greek, was “deacons.”

Jumping over a LOT of history, we move to the Lutheran Church in Europe of the 1800’s. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the Catholic Church began to send its formerly convent-restricted sisters into the cities to minister to those who had come to work in the factories as part of the Industrial Revolution, often under terrible conditions. Some German Lutheran pastors saw the work being done by these Catholic sisters and realized that the German Lutheran churches had an untapped resource in unmarried women who, in that culture, were not allowed to live on their own. These pastors founded deaconess communities to serve the needy in their areas. Thus, began what is called the modern Lutheran diaconate.

Some of those reading this article may have an “ah-ha” moment, remembering hospitals with the word

“Deaconess” in their titles. Yes, as more and more Lutherans from Europe immigrated to the U.S., there was the need for social services. Trained Deaconesses were sent by the German churches to lead and staff institutions such as hospitals, orphanages and other agencies. Eventually, the various Lutheran and primarily ethnic-based church bodies would begin their own deaconess communities,



Deacon Jean Anderson and Deacon Myrna Andersen (front row) at the ELCA churchwide offices in Chicago serving on a Northern Illinois Synod team to introduce the new Evangelical Lutheran Worship resources in 2006.

the descendent of which is the Deaconess Community of the ELCA. In addition to this community, some of those who are part of the roster of Ministers of Word and Service are also members of the independent Lutheran Deaconess Conference (Valparaiso, IN). And, although not previously titled deacon or diaconal, those men and women who had been Associates in Ministry served the ELCA and predecessor church bodies (ALC, LCA, AELC) with hearts for service to others.

Just as the predecessor church bodies of the ELCA began ordaining both men and women as pastors, so also the ELCA agreed at its 1993 Churchwide Assembly, that men as well as women could be called to diaconal ministry, and thus created the diaconal ministry roster.

In the Northern Illinois Synod the ministers of Word and Service serve Christ in a variety of ways – in the congregation, in agencies, and in the Synod office. We serve in the areas of worship and music; youth ministry; pastoral care; administration; teaching and “other duties as assigned.” Our call is to serve Christ according to our gifts and to be a prophetic voice for those Jesus called “the least of them.”

There is so much more I could say about this new, yet very old, area of ministry. Below are a few links to articles about the tradition and history of diaconal ministry. If you want to know more, ask a deacon!

*Living Lutheran* article: <https://is.gd/layrosteredleaders>

The Future of Diaconal Ministry from *CURRENTS in Theology and Mission*: <https://is.gd/futurediaconal>

Report and Recommendations of the Word and Service Task Force: <https://is.gd/wordservicetf>

## Making Christ Known

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