

For the Life of the World

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**Being Church among the Differently Abled:
People First, Baptized First**

By Dr. Jacob A. O. Preus

Kenya Study Abroad Mission Trip

Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

What Is Mercy?

By Deaconess Cynthia E. Lumley, Ph.D.

CONTENTS

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FEATURES

4 **Being Church among the Differently Abled: People First, Baptized First**

By Dr. Jacob A. O. Preus

Without a doubt, charity will always be necessary (Jesus says in Matthew 26:11, “The poor you will always have with you...”). But charity is an activity, not a relationship. It is a result, not a cause. We will always need places like Bethesda whose activities on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities are absolutely necessary. But we mustn’t define the relationship we have with people in the church and as church based upon their intelligence level (or any other ability or disability they may have).

7 **Kenya Study Abroad Mission Trip**

By Dr. Timothy C. J. Quill

CTS is committed to preparing future pastors and deaconesses who are both knowledgeable and passionate about international mission work. Study-abroad trips are an essential component in integrating practical experience with the history, theology and theory of mission taught in the classrooms.

9 **What Is Mercy?**

By Deaconess Cynthia E. Lumley, Ph.D.

The Office of Deaconess has been established by the church in love to support the Office of the Holy Ministry and to assist the faithful in their God-given vocations. But the deaconess does not wait for the people to step into the church; rather she goes out from the door of the church to extend Christ’s hands of mercy to those in need. For example, she may be involved in providing meals, visiting the sick, the lonely and the suffering, assisting the poor to find the resources they need, organizing a “Care and Compassion Committee,” teaching women and children or simply being present and offering a listening ear.

Also in this issue:

Dean Wenthe: An Appreciation	p. 12
What Does This Mean?	p. 15
In the Field	p. 18
Library Expansion: From Concept to Reality	p. 20
Continuing Education	p. 22
Alumni News	p. 25
Profiles in Giving	p. 28
In the Word	p. 30

What Is Mercy?

By Deaconess Cynthia E. Lumley, Ph.D.



Deaconess Pat Nuffer serves through Hands of Mercy in South Sudan.

Have you ever noticed how often we use the word mercy in the Divine Service? We confess our sins to our “most merciful God” or “merciful Father” and we hear the wonderful words of the Absolution spoken by the pastor, “Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins.” We pray in the Kyrie, in the prayer of the church and in the Service of the Sacrament, “Lord have mercy.” In many of the hymns and psalms that we sing, we ask for and extol God’s mercy. Within the church, deaconesses are often referred to as servants of mercy. But have you ever stopped to think about what is encompassed in the word mercy?

We show mercy by serving others, tending to their physical, spiritual and emotional needs. Because Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20), when we care for our neighbor we not only embody Christ’s mercy, we also serve Christ (Matthew 25:40). But putting others first is a tall order, with which our sinful human nature struggles daily.

Mercy begins and ends with God. We learn the true meaning of mercy in His free gift of salvation, won for us not by any merit or worthiness on our part, but through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.



A deaconess is trained to recognize need. Serving alongside the pastor, she uses her skills and theological training to embody Christ's incarnational care, pointing to the light of Christ through her presence, devotions and prayers and thereby pointing to the church, where the pastor administers Christ's mercy through the gifts of Word and Sacraments.

Mercy begins and ends with God. We learn the true meaning of mercy in His free gift of salvation, won for us not by any merit or worthiness on our part, but through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. Even before He created human beings, God knew that His creation would fall (Psalm 139:15-16). His order for salvation was therefore in place before He breathed life into Adam (Ephesians 1:4-10; Matthew 25:34; Hebrews 4:3; Revelation 13:8). And that salvation order was that His own Son, Jesus Christ, would be incarnate as a male human, the second (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 44-49) and perfect Adam (Romans 5:14), and would give His life for His bride, the church (Matthew 9:15; John 3:29; Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 9:7-9, 21:2). What a wonderful, loving, merciful God and heavenly Father we have! He created us, knowing that we would fall to the temptation of the devil, that the punishment we deserve for our sin is death (Romans 6:23), and that He would give His only Son as a ransom for us (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).

At creation, God gave headship and authority to the man Adam (Genesis 1:26) in light of the fact that Christ, the head (bridegroom) of His Church, would be incarnate as a male human. God's only Son took on human flesh in order to care for us, both body and soul—through Jesus' ministry “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them” (Luke 7:22). Jesus “continues His own ministry in and through those He commissions,”¹ as affirmed in John 20:22ff. Through the Holy Office established by Christ, we receive His mercy in the gifts of hearing Christ Himself speak (Luke 10:16), receiving absolution from Christ Himself (Matthew 16:19-20; John 20:21-23), being taught and baptized by Christ Himself (Matthew 28:16-20; cf. Mark 16:15-16) and receiving the Lord's Supper from Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).² The very maleness of pastors is essential to the Holy Office in which they serve, distributing Christ's mercy through the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

The life of Christ's body, the Church, springs from, is fed by and is centered on His Word and Sacraments. His mercy sets us free from sin to serve our neighbor, answering Jesus' call to: “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). Being filled with God's love, we respond by showing love to others (1 John 4:19)—God's love flows through us to our neighbor when we deny ourselves (Luke 9:23) and put the needs of others first, in effect becoming their servants. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, “Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:4-8).

So we show mercy by serving others, tending to their physical, spiritual and emotional needs. Because Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20), when we care for our neighbor we not only embody Christ's mercy, we also serve Christ (Matthew 25:40). But putting others first is a tall order, with which our sinful human nature struggles daily. We live in a society where the importance of the individual is stressed, and we are encouraged to look out for ourselves, even if it is at the expense of others. And the needs of those around us can be so overwhelming that we do not even know where to start in showing mercy. We become emotionally paralyzed; the realization that we cannot possibly help everyone results in our helping no one. Worse still, we become complacent and blind to the needs of those around us.

But thanks be to God! He works through us even, and especially, in our weakness. One way in which He helps us is through the example and teaching of those who have been trained to live a life of mercy, such as deaconesses.


The Office of Deaconess has been established by the church in love to support the Office of the Holy Ministry and to assist the faithful in their God-given vocations. But the deaconess does not wait for the people to step into the church; rather she goes out from the door of the church to extend Christ's hands of mercy to those in need. For example, she may be involved in providing meals, visiting the sick, the lonely and the suffering, assisting the poor to find the resources they need, organizing a "Care and Compassion Committee," teaching women and children or simply being present and offering a listening ear.

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Theological study provides the foundation for a life of mercy. At Concordia Theological Seminary we offer two programs through which women can study theology at the Master's level and prepare for deaconess certification in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: a residential M.A. program and a M.A. in Deaconess Studies which is delivered through a combination of on-campus intensives and online courses. Both programs focus on the Theology of Mercy. Through their study of exegetical, historical and systematic theology, diaconal ministry and their practical experiences, students gain an understanding of:

- the Biblical theology of mercy and the Christological basis for diakonia;
- the Office of Deaconess as an office of mercy, embodied in concrete acts of mercy and charity; and
- a Biblical understanding of the Office of the Holy Ministry, together with an appreciation of the unique relation of the deaconess to the office of the public ministry and how she might best serve alongside and in support of the pastor.

Graduates of our program now serve in congregations, institutions and in missions, in the U.S.A. and abroad, using their theological training together with their unique gifts and talents to demonstrate merciful compassion toward the hurting, with the grace of Christ. What does merciful compassion look like? It is as diverse as teaching a young woman experiencing a crisis pregnancy the sanctity of life and love for her unborn child; comforting someone who is dying, along with their family, as well as helping them with practical needs; reaching out to military veterans and their families; providing companionship for an elderly widow; finding local counseling resources for her parishioners; caring for those with developmental disabilities; or helping children with HIV/AIDS in an African orphanage.

Deaconess Studies is a portal through which women may enter into consecrated service of Christ and His Church, embodying Christ's incarnational love and assisting His body, the Church, to show mercy through various vocations and tasks that serve the needy in our midst. 

Dr. Cynthia E. Lumley serves as Associate Director of Deaconess Studies at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. For additional information on Deaconess Studies, please contact her at Cynthia.Lumley@ctsfw.edu or 260-452-2225.



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Deaconess Carolyn Brinkley reaches out to young and old.

- 1 Weinrich, William. "Called & Ordained. Reflections on the New Testament View of the Office of the Ministry." *Logia*, Vol. II, No. 1 January 1993, pp 24, 25.
- 2 Winger, Thomas M. "The Office of the Holy Ministry According to the New Testament Mandate of Christ." *Logia*, Vol. VII, No. 2 1998, p. 40.