

DIALOG

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Congregational links aid ministry

When Diakon's Bettie Heycock became concerned about children and youths coming to foster care with their belongings thrown into a paper sack, she turned to her congregation to assist. Soon, each youth was receiving a duffel bag that was not only handmade, but also packed with personal items—and a stuffed animal.

The church secretary held out her hands, awaiting anointing. The commissioning event, a joint effort of the local ELCA synod and two Diakon programs, was part of efforts to recognize the vital role church secretaries play in being "front-line" staff of the church and its congregations.

As always, the parishioners gathered for worship, but their trip to church was a short one—just across the retirement campus. Theirs is a unique congregation indeed.

These and other stories of Diakon's ties to Lutheran congregations fill the pages of the various regional editions of Dialog, beginning on Page 3.

In fact, these are among the most important stories we can tell because

they describe a partnership—a partnership between Diakon, which serves on behalf of the church, and its "moral owners," the church and its many expressions including congregations.

The stories reflect how much more is often accomplished when the church, its congregations, and its social ministry organizations come together to touch the lives of those in need.



Our regional format

Beginning on Page 3, you will find our newsletter content focuses on your geographic area. The section you receive—which we call **Diakconnection**—depends on your address or interest in a particular Diakon program or facility.

Four regionalized inserts are produced: Delaware-Maryland, Lower Susquehanna, Northeastern Pennsylvania, and Upper Susquehanna. The regions parallel synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The regionalized **Dialog** provides interesting information about the retirement living communities and the Congregation, Children, and Family Services programs in your area—and about those they serve.

If you are interested in receiving an insert different from the one in this issue, please contact Mary Seip at 1-877-342-5667, ext. 1215. In addition, each of the four inserts can be viewed on our Web site, www.diakon.org.

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Serving the next generation

At Diakon, we're doing a lot of thinking these days about life after retirement.

My grandmother—and the other members of the “greatest generation”—approached retirement age knowing that a move to a nursing home was very likely.

Not wanting to be a burden to their families, she and her peers often made those moves while still able to care for themselves. For them, the move to a nursing home was not really a choice, but an inevitability.

My wife, Mary Jo, and I represent the next generation, a generation that is used to—indeed expects—much more in terms of choice.

Having grown up in a time when many more options have been available to us, we “baby boomers” will be a more complex and challenging group to satisfy as we move into our retirement years.

Yet meeting needs, even when they change dramatically, is part of our mission at Diakon.

The conditions of shalom, which we believe God wants for us, include shelter and a loving community in which to live. If we are to continue to provide shalom to all those older adults who come to us for service, we must offer what they seek.

And so we are preparing to meet the challenges of serving this next generation of older persons. Diakon is in the midst of a major repositioning of our senior services and retirement communities.

We are, for example, developing services delivered to people in their homes using technology, professional staff, and volunteers.

As more and more people request care at home, we will be ready with a

variety of quality options. Our staff is already offering a pilot program—called Diakon Help at Home—for people who want to remain at home while receiving care that my grandmother would have thought was available only in a nursing home.

Should that program prove successful—and early indications are that it will—we hope to develop it in other locales.

At the same time, we are moving ahead with plans to offer more variety in our retirement accommodations. Independent

living will dominate the options on our campuses, as we move toward what we call a continuum of active-lifestyle retirement services. That's what more and more people coming to us seek.

We will offer an enhanced menu of amenities from which people can select according to their desired lifestyle. Wellness centers, neighborhood retail and service centers, and hospitality programs will be built into the very fabric and culture of our retirement living communities, enhancing the lifestyle for all who live there.

Over the years, God has called Diakon and its predecessor agencies to meet people where they are and to offer needed services in their retirement years.

We are certainly grateful for the ministries of our many nursing homes. Through them, we have cared for thousands of people like my grandmother, as God has enabled us to provide to them the aspects of shalom—including shelter, health care, food, and a loving community in which to live.

As the next generation reaches retirement, we will meet them where *they* are. We will develop innovative home-based and retirement living services and redesign our retirement living communities to offer the services people desire.

Transformations of our campuses will become a common sight.

As we embark upon this work, we give thanks for the opportunity to find new ways to “love the neighbor through acts of service.”

We ask for your prayers and support as Diakon prepares to serve even more older adults of this and the next generation of retirees.



The Rev. Daun E. McKee,
Ph.D., President/CEO

Wilderness Center to be dedicated

more and more difficult to take youths off the grounds for various activities. The completed renovations will allow the expansion of the center's services."

The center houses four TresslerCare programs: Wilderness Challenge Course, Wilderness Challenge+Plus short-term residential program, the longer-term Wilderness School residential program, and the Weekend Alternative Program, which offers wilderness-based, community-service, and counseling programs for youths in other care during the week. The programs serve adjudicated delinquent and dependent youths from across Pennsylvania.

The expansion project has allowed the school to create a greenhouse-based horticultural therapy program and to expand its residential programs to include females.

"The gym space will be invaluable as far as providing recreational activities for the kids," says Smith, adding that the renovations increase classroom space as well. "We also are implementing a drug and alcohol component to the program that we believe will draw further referrals. Our emphasis remains on continually enhancing treatment services."

Although the original \$2 million capital campaign was successfully completed, contributions are still needed for equipment and program costs. Environmental issues required the construction of a state-of-the-art sewerage system, whose treated effluent is used in the greenhouse.

Youths are already selling flowers grown in the greenhouse, with the work counting toward the center's community service activities.

The Wilderness Center now boasts a greenhouse-based horticultural therapy program.

Wilderness Center expansion has facilitated the creation of residential services for females.

After kicking off its capital campaign two years ago, Diakon's **TresslerCare Wilderness Center** near Boiling Springs, Pa., is set to dedicate its newly completed dormitory, gymnasium/multi-purpose building, and green house.

The dedication ceremony will be held at 1 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 13, with invitees to include clergy, congregations, and donors; the local community also is invited. An open house will be held the previous day for referral sources—staff members of juvenile probation and children and youth service offices from counties across Pennsylvania.

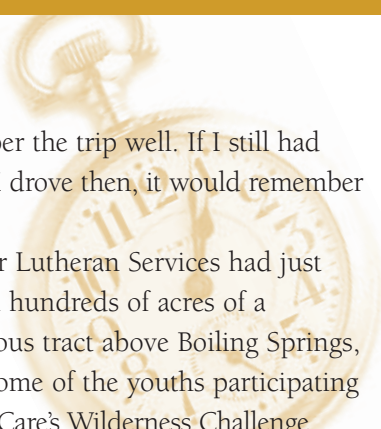
"Although the capital campaign began two years ago, these renovations—especially the dormitory—have been a desire of the agency for the last 15 years," says Craig Smith, TresslerCare's executive director. "The facility's infrastructure originally was a summer campground and was never meant for year-round occupation.

"As the Wilderness Center's census grew in recent years, it had become



Address Service Requested

TIMELINE: 1986



I remember the trip well. If I still had the car I drove then, it would remember it, too.

Tressler Lutheran Services had just purchased hundreds of acres of a mountainous tract above Boiling Springs, Pa., and some of the youths participating in TresslerCare's Wilderness Challenge Course, which had been operating for several years, were camping at this new site. I was to take photographs of them.

The directions for the trip included travel for two miles on the dirt road on which I now found myself. I was certain, however, that I had already traveled five miles and left large portions of my car on the trail behind me.

Frustrated, with no camp in sight and only more rutted dirt lane ahead of me, I turned around and headed back to the office.

It turned out I was about a quarter-mile from the campers.

And so ended my first trek to what would become the TresslerCare Wilderness Center.

Where I turned around would later become the site of the center's 50-foot Alpine climbing tower. At that point, it was a large patch of brush and weeds. If I had traveled just a little farther, I would have come upon the roads leading to the rustic cabins and lodges soon to be used for offices and student housing.

Diakon's Wilderness Center has come a long way since those days.

In November, staff members and volunteers will dedicate the center's new classroom/gymnasium building, dormitory, and state-of-the-art greenhouse, in which students at the residential school for at-risk youths raise plants as part of a horticultural therapy program and as a way to take part in community-service activities (*see the article on the Inside Back Cover*).

At the time of that first trip, the site hosted only the month-long Wilderness Challenge Course—and the dream of creating a unique school to help adjudicated delinquent and dependent youths

from across Pennsylvania.

Today, the Wilderness Center serves as base for four programs: challenge course, short- and long-term residential programs, and the Weekend Alternative Program. The recent dormitory addition has sparked the creation of a residential program for girls, much sought by county children and youth and juvenile probation agencies.

And church, business, and community groups regularly use that 50-foot tower, as well as an adjacent initiatives area, for team-building efforts.

In the years since that trip, several thousands teens from across Pennsylvania have benefited—had their lives put back on the right track—by the unique and rich array of services offered on this wooded setting.

And, yes, the road is much better these days.

—William Swanger
Editor