

DIALOG

FALL 2002

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Thirty years of love

"I didn't have to worry about being left behind," recalls Marie Dreisbach. "You had a family . . . it was permanent—you knew it was permanent."

Celebrating that permanence—and all the love and stability it brings—was at the heart of a mid-September event hosted by Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries at Knoebel's Amusement Resort.

Nearly 500 members of adoptive families from several states gathered at the park near Elysburg, Pa., to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries' adoption programs—Tressler Adoption Services and Adoption Services of The Lutheran Home at Topton.

In those three decades, the programs have placed more than 3,500 children,

many of them considered to have special needs. In November, Diakon will celebrate the finalization of the 3,500th adoption.

"It's amazing that so many children have found their worlds changed by these loving adoptive families," says Linda Ciampi, vice president for Diakon's Congregation, Children, and Family Services. "Permanency is just so important. To experience success as an adult, you really need a foundation with a permanent, loving, stable family. Our program—and these families—have helped to provide that for so many."

Designed as a relaxing day of fun for adoptive families, the event featured a picnic lunch, brief program, cake-cutting, and lots of time in the park for families.

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Our new format

We hope you like the new design of *Dialog*. Even more changes are in store.

Beginning with the next issue, slated for publication by December, *Dialog* will include a regional center section. We plan initially to publish four regional editions, covering the territories of the Delaware-Maryland, Lower Susquehanna, Northeastern Pennsylvania, and Upper Susquehanna synods, ELCA.

The regional sections will take the place of the many community newsletters being published for our retirement villages under such names as *Life at Ohesson Manor/Locust Grove Retirement Village* and *Life at The Lutheran Home at Topton*. The information you have found

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Adoptive children blow out 30 candles on a cake at Adoption Services' 30th anniversary celebration.

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It's time for church's moral leadership

Shealing with joy at her good fortune, the little girl ran—no, skipped—across the pavilion toward me and the two free passes to Knoebel's Amusement Resort that I held.

She had won them at the recent 30th anniversary celebration of our adoption services.

It warmed the hearts of every adult there to see this simple expression of a child's delight.

Unfortunately, far too many children in our country have far too little joy.

Recently, Linda Ciampi, Diakon's vice president for Congregation, Children, and Family Services, and I presented a paper on children's issues to the "Futures Group" composed of executives of a number of Lutheran social ministry organizations across the country.

Excerpted and summarized here are portions of that paper:

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson

recently noted that the expectation that church leadership "should take concrete steps to strengthen families is both an opportunity and a burden."

At the heart of the effort must be an understanding of our nation's history—in which children largely have been viewed as property—and of two basic needs: Children's need for family, and the family's need for strengths.

What children need now is what they have always needed. Children need parents.

They need people who are effective and permanent parents, so that they are adequately fed, kept warm and safe, are educated, receive good medical care as well as special care to meet special needs, receive spiritual guidance—and are loved.

Unfortunately, this is not the case for far too many of our children.

Adults, including public leaders,

have learned to say what is appropriate and "correct" about how we value children. Yet public and private decisions often contradict spoken words. We say children are the most important priority of our life, yet they often get our "left-overs" in time, energy, and commitment of resources.

Corporate America is just one example of the contradiction of words and actions. While valued in advertising and corporate literature, children are frequently viewed as a distraction and impediment to business at hand. Personnel policies, work schedules, demands on parents' time at work, and the lack of safe, affordable child care at work sites are indications of where priorities truly lie.

In his book, *The American Dream*, Dan Rather writes of parents who believe in their children and the value of education and who give to their children a foundation on which to build their lives.



*The Rev. Dawn E. Mckee,
Ph.D., President/CEO*

But many children are not cherished, celebrated, or nourished. Today, some 550,000 children languish in foster care (and only 50 percent of children needing temporary care can be placed because of the shortage of appropriate placements) and 134,000 need and desire a permanent home—that is, a family.

It appears the village we have created to rear our children is flawed and out of control:

- The percentage of children living with one parent increased to 26 percent in 2000.
- Only 24 percent of children ages 2 to 5 have an adequate diet.
- Nearly four percent of children under the age of 18 live in households experiencing insecurity with moderate to severe hunger.
- Thirty percent of twelfth-graders, 26 percent of tenth graders, and 14 percent of eighth graders are reported to be heavy drinkers of alcohol. Slightly lower percentages are reported to be users of illicit drugs—percentages up 44 percent since 1992.
- An April 19, 2002, press release from the Administration for Children and Families reports that 12.2 children per 1,000 in America are maltreated annually, with 84 percent of those children abused by a parent or parents.

The underlying societal issues of poverty, inadequate health care, domestic violence, and substance abuse must be addressed if we are to create stable families for children. But the environment in the village we have created makes protecting children from neglect and abuse, placing them in permanent, secure homes, and striving for united, strong, effective families a tremendous challenge.

More and more families and children come to helping organizations with multiple problems that require a

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Changing the world, one child at a time



Adoptive families from Pennsylvania and Maryland were treated to a day in the park at Knoebel's Amusement Resort in Elysburg, Pa., as part of Diakon's celebration of 30 years of adoption services.

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"The adoption programs," noted the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., Diakon president and CEO, in brief remarks to the families, "continue our historic mission to children, which began in the 1800s with the opening of two homes for children."

The organizations that operated those homes, Tressler Lutheran Services and The Lutheran Home at Topton, began adoption services in 1972 as they continued to broaden services to children and their families.

"Innovation marks adoption services' history," McKee said. "Innovations included specialized training for prospective adoptive parents involving experienced adoptive parents, our focus on children with special needs—especially at a time few adoption programs had such a focus—and links with other programs such as fost-to-adopt as we worked to bring permanency to the lives of children in foster care."

That innovation and leadership, he added, lie behind Diakon's receipt of the multi-year contract to operate Pennsylvania's Statewide Adoption Network, or SWAN. "This is one more way we are broadening our outreach to children," he said.

Dreisbach could certainly appreciate the anniversary, for her adoption occurred 30 years ago. Today, she says that being adopted provided her with the security of a stable family as well as taught her to be a parent.

"Being a mother now, I am very protective . . . It gives me a good feeling being there for them, as my adoptive parents were there for me."

Dreisbach's adoptive parents, of Hazleton, Pa., know the feeling. Participants in the celebration as well, they say adopting children changed their lives forever—and for the better.



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Mission: In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries will demonstrate God's command to love the neighbor through acts of service.

Diakon serves some 50,000 persons annually in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware through adoption, foster care, refugee services, volunteer home care, retirement villages, housing accommodations, congregational ministries, hospice services, and more.

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Adoption countdown: Hong Kong child's X's

When you see John and Peggy Taylor of Glen Rock, Pa., with their daughters, Rosa and Emma, it's nearly impossible to imagine that, a year ago, Emma was in foster care halfway around the globe, hoping some day that she would have a permanent family.

That day has come.

Her adoption, handled by Diakon's Tressler Adoption Services of Maryland, represents Diakon's recent partnership with International Social Services of Hong Kong to help find permanent, loving homes for Hong Kong children with special needs.

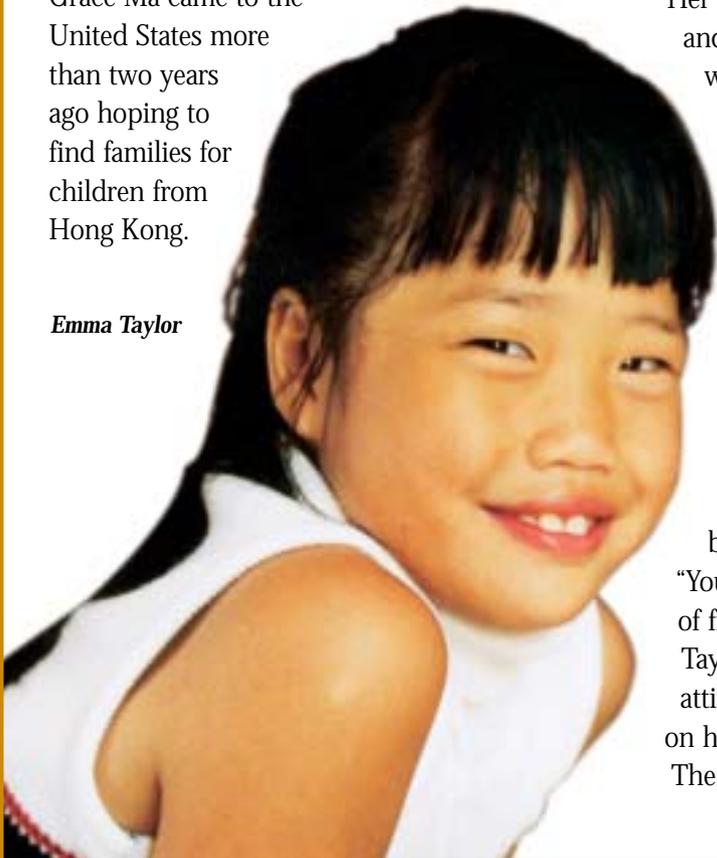
Emma has found such a home with the Taylors.

Yet for a time following Sept. 11 of last year, it seemed as if the adoption might never be.

It seemed the little X's a child had been marking on her calendar, her countdown, might mean nothing . . .

International Social Services of Hong Kong representatives Steven Yan and Grace Ma came to the United States more than two years ago hoping to find families for children from Hong Kong.

Emma Taylor



Holding the government contract for adoption services, the agency was having difficulty placing some children in permanent homes in Hong Kong, especially older children and those with special needs.

Yan and Ma came to Maryland at the end of a whirlwind tour of the country. There, they met Ramona Hoyle, director of Tressler Adoption Services of Maryland.

As Hoyle and Ma spoke, the colleagues realized they faced similar challenges, even though they worked thousands of miles apart.

While Hoyle had handled international adoptions in the past, her office had never placed a child from Hong Kong. She knew that international adoptions could be extremely challenging for both child and parents, with the process often long, unpredictable, and expensive. However, she was so impressed by Ma's commitment to children that Hoyle resolved to help in any way she could.

Her first step was to alert "ready and waiting" families—those who had completed Diakon's adoptive-family training and were ready to adopt. One of those families was the Taylors.

John and Peggy Taylor had first come to Tressler Adoption Services six years earlier, ready to adopt their first child.

They had tried other adoption services and had been deeply disappointed. "Your agency was like a breath of fresh air," remembers John Taylor, "A whole different attitude," focused primarily on helping children.

The Taylors adopted Rosa and

were so pleased that when they decided to adopt again, they came back to Diakon. When they received Hoyle's letter about the possibility of adopting from Hong Kong, they responded immediately.

Following a self-evaluation process

"She was a child who needed a home . . . and we had a home to give."

to determine if international adoption was right for them, the Taylors began reviewing profiles of children in Hong Kong, supplied by Ma. They were

looking for another girl, to be a little sister for Rosa.

When they saw Emma's picture and read her profile, they knew right away that she would be a wonderful fit for their family.

After talking to Emma on the telephone, the family was even more convinced. The fact that Emma came from another country made no difference to them.

"She was a child who needed a home," says Peggy Taylor, "and we had a home to give."

Early in 2001, the family began the lengthy process of completing a variety of forms, filing paperwork, and making phone calls.

"Burdensome, kind of a roller-coaster ride," is how John Taylor describes the process, yet both he and his wife praise adoption staff members for helping them through the complex maze of rules and regulations.

In the meantime, Emma was placed with an English-speaking foster family in Hong Kong, to improve her language skills before coming to the United States. All the while, she continued to talk to the Taylors on the telephone.

Finally, word came that Emma would be able to join the Taylors in late November. For the newly expanded family, it would be a true Thanksgiving.

on her calendar

In Hong Kong, Emma began to cross off the days on a calendar, counting down the time until she could come to her new home.

Then, on Sept. 11, Emma's adoption process came to a halt.

The terrorist attacks on the United States prompted the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to halt all applications for entry into the country, including Emma's adoption. There was nothing anyone could do but wait.

It was a difficult time for the Taylors, as the country struggled with the devastation of the attack and the couple faced the uncertainties of when they might bring their new child into their lives.

Finally, word came. Emma would join them for Christmas.

Again, however, the family was to be disappointed. Christmas came and went, but Emma remained in Hong Kong, the result of additional government delays and complications.

The waiting and hard work paid off on Feb. 1 of this year, when Emma, accompanied by a social worker from Hong Kong, arrived at Baltimore/Washington International Airport.

With the Taylors were Cheryl Drake, their adoption caseworker from the program's York office who had helped them with their family profile and ISS and immigration paperwork, and Shirley Cherry, the York office's child placement coordinator.

Spying the group, Emma rushed forward with big hugs for her new mother, father, and big sister.

Today, Emma is happy and well adjusted. She does well in school and gets along with her big sister. Eager to learn, "she asks 'what's that?' every time she hears a new word," says her mother.

When the Taylors talk about Rosa and Emma, the pride and love in their voices are unmistakable. The girls fit right in with the family and seem as if they have been part of it forever.

Taking part in Diakon's recent 30th anniversary celebration for adoption services, they speak highly of the program and the staff members who worked so hard to help them bring

Emma home.

They have "always been there for us when we needed them," says Peggy Taylor. "I've recommended them to many people."

At the same time the Taylors were adopting Emma with the support of the York office, the Maryland program was working to place two other

children from Hong Kong.

Despite the potential complications such as the Taylors faced, Hoyle believes Hong Kong adoptions will continue to be a good choice for many families.

The process, she notes, can be more predictable, shorter in length, and less expensive than many other international adoptions.

"Families can rely on us to provide the assistance they need in the adoption process," says Hoyle, "as well as special support groups after the adoption is finalized. As long as there are children—here in the United States or in places as far away as Hong Kong—who wait for families, we will be there." ■



The Taylors pose for a family portrait: (from left) John, Peggy, Emma, and Rosa.

Thirty years . . .

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"Adopting four kids has been a blessing. We have appreciated seeing the children grow up and become something. It has blessed our lives, that's for sure," says Richard Issermoyer. "Adoption is so important to give someone a chance, something to look forward to, to give them a good start in life."

Dreisbach's mother, Karen Issermoyer, adds, "We believe we've given the kids an opportunity to enjoy a home that is happy and secure. Our kids have expressed the joy that they were able to have a stable home."

McKee underscored their role as adoptive parents. None of the last 30 years' service would have been possible without one ingredient—the agency's adoptive parents, he noted. "They are the key to our service to children. They are the ones bringing love, permanency, and hope to children in need."

But perhaps the day's key comment came from Ramona Hoyle, director of the agency's adoption services in Maryland, as she spoke to a video crew:

"Adoption is important because everyone needs a family." ■

For information on adoption or upcoming parent-training programs, readers may call Diakon's Adoption Services offices at:

- (717) 845-9113, York, Pa.
- (610) 682-1504, Topton, Pa.
- (410) 633-6990, Baltimore, Md.

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries thanks the following sponsors for their assistance in hosting the adoption celebration: Continuing Care Rx, Harrisburg, Pa. (major corporate sponsor); Middleswarth Potato Chips of Middleburg, Pa.; Ream Printing Co. of York, Pa.; Twin Arches, Ltd. (McDonald's), Harrisburg, Pa.; and Knoebel's Amusement Resort of Elysburg, Pa.



Playing baseball with a big league ball player, even if it's a former big leaguer, is "pretty cool."

That was the consensus of children and teens from TresslerCare's foster care, in-home, and Wilderness School programs, who played ball on a hot afternoon this summer under the tutelage of former Pittsburgh Pirate pitcher Dock Ellis.

The game was held at the Doubleday Country Inn and Farm near Landisburg,

Pa. The event has become an annual one for youths served by TresslerCare.

Wearing old-fashioned baseball uniforms, the youths were divided into two teams, with Ellis coaching first base for both teams.

"It's great getting out to play and have fun," said Jason, a foster youth. "It's pretty cool" rubbing elbows with Ellis. Another youth, a resident of the TresslerCare Wilderness Center for adjudicated delinquent or dependent boys, said he enjoyed seeing that Dock Ellis "was just a regular guy, like us."

Ellis spent the majority of his Major League career pitching for the Pittsburgh Pirates. He also played with the New York Yankees, Oakland Athletics, Texas Rangers, and The New York Mets. In addition to baseball, he worked for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections helping to rehabilitate African American inmates.



In 1971, he and a group of African American athletes formed the Black Athletes Foundation for Sickle Cell Research, an organization focused on lobbying and raising money for research and treatment of sickle cell anemia.

The TresslerCare programs serve adjudicated delinquent and dependent children and youths from counties across Pennsylvania through a continuum of services. ■



The annual Schuylkill County Miles for Meals on Wheels fund-raising walk raised more than \$3,000 this year.

The funds will provide two special meals each to more than 500 homebound clients in the county. Special meals are provided during such times as holidays.

This year's event was held in Pine Grove, with highlights of the history-focused walking tour including the Beaux Arts-style Pine Grove Theater, the birthplace and home of Pulitzer Prize- and National Book Award-winning author Conrad Richter, St. Peter's Lutheran Cemetery (burial site of Hessian mercenary

soldiers from the Revolutionary War), the Union Canal basin, and the Major Peter Filbert House, made of wood sawn to resemble marble blocks.

Next year's event will be held in Ashland. Schuylkill County Meals on Wheels is a Diakon program funded in part by the county Office of Senior Services. ■



Emma and Harold Klinepeter, both residents of Perry Village at New Bloomfield, Pa., recently renewed their wedding vows in celebration of their 35th wedding anniversary. The Rev. David Peterson, village chaplain, at left, performs the service, which featured the presentation of a plaque from Gov. Mark Schweiker.

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries' corporate offices have relocated to Allentown, Pa.

The new corporate offices are housed on the third floor of the agency's Medical Arts Building at Luther Crest. The building's first and second floors contain the offices of several physician group practices.

Previously located in the Old Main building on the campus of The Lutheran Home at Topton, the corporate offices were moved to allow use of Old Main by the retirement programs at Topton. One of the initial changes will be relocation of the Brandywine Library from the lower floor of the Family Life Services building to Old Main.

Diakon also maintains financial and some support offices at Mechanicsburg, Pa., in the former headquarters of Tressler Lutheran Services, one of the two agencies that created Diakon in January 2000.

The President's Dialog Continued from Page 2

coordinated and several-agency response. Yet the system providing services to children and families remains fragmented and underfunded.

What is the church to do?

The art of parenting appears to be a dying art. Can we as the church help to create a society that allows parents to give real priority to the daunting and enormous tasks of rearing children?

We must begin by asking that our children not be treated as property belonging to parents, but as precious gifts from God on loan to this world for a time. They are the precious responsibility of a village formed and functioning for their benefit.

No one will dispute that children need stable families. No one will dispute there are many different and effective kinds of families. What we as the church and its institutions must begin to debate is what makes a family adequate. Can the church and its institutions then develop the will and the tools to help families learn to be more adequate in today's world?

We must ask ourselves how we can sing in our Sunday Schools, *Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak, but He is strong*, while unnoticed in the apartments next to the church . . .

- A mother who received no prenatal care gives birth to a crack-addicted baby and is sent home with the infant, with no or little supervision, but with orders to attend only six weeks of parenting training and have random drug tests.

- An eight-year-old is court-ordered to have visitation with the step-father who sexually abused her.

- A child who suffers from cigarette burns on his back is ordered back into his birth-home after several months of foster care and then returned to the foster care system with multiple broken bones.

And the list goes on.

What of the children who live in the shadows of our church whose parents do not cherish them and who do not invest their lives in them?

What of the children whose parents love their drugs or addictions or careers or self more than their children?

What of the children who are frightened of closeness and intimacy because all they have experienced is separation and loneliness?

What of the families who struggle to be adequate, who put their children first, but who fight an uphill battle in our society?

What of the challenges adequate parents have struggling against the entertainment industry and selfish demands of some corporations?

What of the children who need strong parents—parents who are secure enough in themselves to make tough decisions and choices, and will care for their children no matter what?

Bishop Hanson gave us a beginning

for the church's journey to espouse moral leadership in the value of families and children.

- We desire to have prayer, Scripture, and faith formation more central in family life.

- We recognize it is important for families to spend significant time together to have quality relationships.

- We realize adequate income, child care, housing, education, and health care support are necessary for the development of healthy families.

- We know we must have an expanded definition and perception of what constitutes a family.

But our country's myth that families and children are valued above all other aspects of American life continues.

The church in all its forms must begin to help transform this myth into reality. Espousing its moral leadership is a first step. ■

New format . . .

Continued from Cover

in those newsletters will appear in the regional section of *Dialog*.

We are making this change for several reasons:

- To be better stewards. Combining various newsletters into one will save funds.

- To offer more information. The regional section will provide information about all programs in the region, as well as coming events. Currently, you must read two, three, or even four publications to gather that information.

- To provide a more attractive publication. The efficiencies involved will allow us to produce a full-color newsletter, such as you now read. ■

TIMELINE

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The Lutheran Home at Harrisburg

The Lutheran Home at Harrisburg was dedicated in April of 1952, serving 27 residents. Additional facilities were established on the West Shore in 1957 and in upper Dauphin County in 1961.

While Tressler had earlier been focused only on children and families, its association with LSS set the stage for rapid expansion. The Tressler Lutheran Fund, an endowment now part of the Diakon Lutheran Fund, was used as a guarantee for funding to begin a number of new nursing homes and retirement communities, many in rural areas in partnership with county governments. ■

Address Service Requested

TIMELINE: 1907

While Tressler Lutheran Services and The Lutheran Home at Topton may have had similar origins as orphanages (see this page in our Summer 2002 issue), they expanded to offer retirement services in quite different fashion.

And while the Tressler Orphans Home began several decades before the Topton facility, Topton entered the senior-housing market earlier. In fact, Tressler became involved in retirement services only through an organizational affiliation.

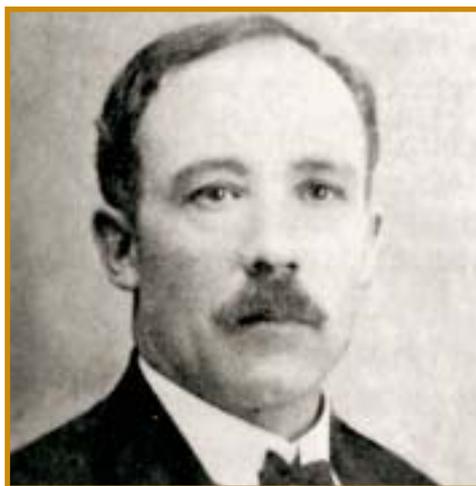
Services to older persons began on the Topton campus in 1940, when The Lutheran Home at Topton's trustees authorized the use of the Annie Lowry Memorial Hospital (see our Spring 2002 issue) to house 10 "aged guests."

The actual planning for senior services at Topton, however, began in 1907!

It was then that the Rev. Dr. John H.

Raker, D.D., who had resigned as superintendent, announced that \$5,500 had been raised for an "old folks' home" at Topton.

Although this funding excited the trustees, the home's primary emphasis was children and so no action was taken until 1940. The Lowry facility's first senior "guest," 79-year-old Fyanna



The Rev. Dr. John H. Raker

Flicker of Dryville, arrived in May 1941.

Additional facilities for older persons were added in 1950, following the purchase of a nearby building for conversion into the Heilman Cottage for Old Folks, which housed 17 guests, and the purchase of Caum Memorial Home in Reading in 1955.

"Infirmary"—that is, nursing care—facilities were added on the Topton campus in 1962. Additional retirement communities, such as Luther Crest, followed.

Tressler's entry into retirement services occurred through the organization's association in 1970 with Lutheran Social Services-Central Penn Region. One of LSS-Central Penn Region's founding organizations was the Lutheran Service Society of Greater Harrisburg.

A fund-raising drive in the early 1950s netted \$100,000 to purchase and remodel a home for the aging.

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