

DIALOG

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Commitment to care

The boy's parents had divorced and left the area, leaving behind their seven-year-old as well.

"They lived unsettled, rather chaotic lives and did not feel able to provide for a child," says the director of a **Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries** counseling program. "Thankfully, the boy's grandmother stepped forward to fill the void."

The abrupt change in the child's life left emotional scars, however, and Diakon began to work with boy and grandmother to begin the healing.

That's when insurance coverage was denied. "We worked to make sure that every alternative had been explored," says the director. "In the end, it boiled down to whether we were going to provide care or turn him away. The boy did not know

about insurance and authorizations for treatment. He was here for help and hope. He found both."

That's just one of numerous stories—some told in the regional **Diakonnection** sections within this issue of *Dialog*—in which Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries served without regard to residents' or clients' financial resources.

In fact, in 2003 Diakon provided more than \$15.4 million in uncompensated care. That figure includes the cost to provide service in excess of Medicaid reimbursements for skilled nursing care, benevolent care in other retirement services, and funding for children's and family programs that serve those unable to pay the full cost of service.

Instances of benevolent care can be found in nearly every Diakon program, from counseling clients who cannot pay for care to residents of assisted living facilities who have exhausted their financial resources, to the KidzStuff Child Care Center in Baltimore, where Diakon provided more than \$300,000 in subsidy last year, helping to ensure a brighter future for nearly 200 children.

"We willingly provide this care because it's a hallmark of our mission—to serve people in need, especially those at lower income levels," says the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., Diakon president/CEO. "In fact, one of the reasons we want to 'grow' Diakon is to have more resources to serve even more people. Of course, gifts from donors are crucial in our continuing ability to serve those with greatest need—and the least resources."

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 **Diakonnection**—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 villages and 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 1-888-582-2230, ext. 1215. In addition, each of the four inserts can be viewed on our Web site, www.diakon.org.

Rockin' support

Ariel Reeve and Sarah Spece, left to right, from Trinity Lutheran Church, Pottsville, recently supported Diakon's programs for at-risk youths by "rockin' round the clock." Story in the Northeastern Pennsylvania regional edition of Dialog.



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Church must confront addiction

At a recent meeting of executives from social ministry programs serving the Delaware-Maryland Synod, discussion turned to the devastating effects drug abuse has on families, neighborhoods, and congregations. During that discussion, we also touched on some of the issues included in my column in the Winter 2003-4 *Dialog*, entitled "A lament for not seeing 'the hidden.'" Poverty and drug abuse—you cannot separate the interaction each has on the other.

The Rev. Karen Brau, pastor of *Amazing Grace Lutheran Church* in Baltimore, shared with the group her personal experiences of seeing the damaging and depersonalizing impact poverty and drug abuse have on the neighborhoods surrounding her congregation. She agreed to share part of her reflections with us as we continue to identify issues important to discuss if we are to be a public church in public life. The section below reflects Pastor Brau's discussions with a *Dialog* writer:

With 60,000 addicts in Baltimore, the impact of addictions is felt in nearly every household. "It might not be Mom or Dad, but it is cousin, aunt, or uncle," says the Rev. Karen Brau. "What addiction does to families is that it rips the fabric of stability. Often, addiction arises out of a very painful place that folks are trying to fill. The pain can be generational, yet I have also seen recovery have a healing effect across generations. Part of what I continue to wonder is how the church can have a positive part in being open to talking about addictions and up-front about God's desire for recovery and shalom."

During a recent orientation for the church's art club with a group of students from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Pastor Brau stood up. "I just want you to know that sometime

this semester, one of the children involved in this program will have someone in their family die of drug violence," she said to the students, explaining that they needed to understand the children's environment.

As she addressed the students, a 15-year-old boy waited to the side. When she was finished, the pastor talked with the boy. "He said to me, 'I came to you because my 14-year-old cousin was just shot in the back of the head. There was blood everywhere and the helicopter that is flying around is looking for who shot him.'" The boy ran quickly away.

"The effects of addiction and drug dealing are very devastating," Brau adds. "Much of the violence in the inner city is drug-related, and this violence shakes all the corners of our neighbor-

hoods. I feel weighed down when I consider all the lives that have been lost because of continuing violence. At the same time, however, I have experienced extraordinary gifts serving in the inner city. I have learned about the deep and abiding love of God in Jesus Christ. I have seen the theology of the cross lived out and have witnessed the power of the resurrection—for in the mix of addiction and poverty, there are people and families who have stepped into lives of recovery."

Amazing Grace and a few other courageous congregations are trying to help break the cycle by creating a safe and nurturing environment for the children of their communities. The children caught in these neighborhoods of violence, uncertainty, and instability need us desperately. Trapped by poverty and addiction, entire families live in desperate loneliness, hopelessness, and fear.

On behalf of every other person who works in these collapsed neighborhoods, Pastor Brau pleads, "We cannot hide from it." The societal issues will—and have—spread to every other neighborhood and village in our country. As she reminds us, "We must look at it from the context of our faith and that the church is a healing place that can provide strength for families, so that we can all believe that very basic thing—that we are beloved children of God. There are adults at Amazing Grace who have moved away from death into new life in recovery—and testimonials abound about the saving power of Jesus Christ. Faith like this is a gift to the church outside the inner city."

And that is the point of this article.

We, the church, must speak the truth even when it is not well received. Communities are rotting away as the result of poverty and drugs—and certainly not just the neighborhoods of inner cities. Addiction is a problem, too, of the suburbs

Please turn to Inside Back Cover



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

Addiction

Continued from Inside Front Cover

and rural communities within the areas we serve. There is just not the will within most of our congregations and agencies to see the true situation for what it is and to call it our sickness. Before we can confront either the devastation of poverty or the destruction of addiction, we must first confront our own blindness to its existence around us. We must see it before we can deal with it.

The steeple with a cross on it for us at Diakon is the Isaiah image of Shalom. In our understanding of that writer, we find God's desire is for us to have—or to help restore for one another—the five conditions of the true peace God wills for us: food, shelter, health or healing, a meaningful vocation, and a sense of community.

How can we help to restore Shalom to our neighbors if our neighbors in poverty and addiction are invisible to us? Part of that response, says Pastor Brau, is treatment. "The church can be present to the spirit of moving toward recovery, but as we consider our public role, does the church support places for people to receive treatment?"

Further, our seeing those with addictions and those in poverty—truly seeing them—will help to bring to them what Pastor Brau believes may arise from twice-monthly worship services she and the Rev. Gregory Knepp, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church, Pimlico, are developing for families and persons dealing with recovery: "...A gift for the people who are looking for the church to be more real in their lives."

The framework, notes Karen Brau, "is the interconnection we all have through our God, who created us all and who loves us all. We seem to fall into viewing people of a different race or class over a wall we have built to separate ourselves. God's justice is about opening ourselves to what separates us, and rooting ourselves in the values of love, grace, forgiveness, and hope."



Delaware-Maryland Synod, ELCA

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Office of the Bishop

Jan. 20, 2004

The Rev. Dr. Daun E. McKee
Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries

Dear Daun:

At the meeting of the Synod Council on Jan. 18, I was unanimously instructed to write you on their behalf affirming your editorial in the recent newsletter [*the Winter 2003-4 edition of Dialog – editor*]. Particularly of interest to them was my report of your commitment, referenced in the editorial, to use some of the investment income to Diakon in areas of true poverty.

While we have always been grateful for the ministry supported by Diakon, we are especially encouraged to see movement in dealing with what is a life or death issue for so many. I know that you have worked to keep the KidzStuff day care center open and in the neighborhood where it is, so that the poor there will have a safe place for their children. We have heard again and again how much that is appreciated.

Be assured of our support as you move into areas of service that respond to need but cannot be self-supporting by their very nature. You are following the model of our Lord in moving in that direction.

Peace and joy,

H. Gerald Knoche
Bishop, Delaware-Maryland Synod, ELCA



Residents of Diakon's newest Continuing Care Retirement Community, Cumberland Crossings, Carlisle, Pa., enjoy active retirement living, with all the amenities. To learn more, visit this new section of Diakon's Web site, www.diakon.org/cumberlandcrossings.



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LUTHERAN SERVICES IN AMERICA

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries is part of *Lutheran Services in America*. But many may not know what LSA is—or the significant role it plays in social services and health care in America.

Lutherans' ministry in the world is a clear witness to the Gospel, notes Jill Schumann, president/CEO of Baltimore-based LSA, and it is one whose scope few people may know:

- Lutheran Services in America consists of 296 independent Lutheran health and human service organizations that serve in 3,000 communities across the United States and the Caribbean.
- Together, those organizations last year served more than six million people, or one in 50 Americans!
- For more than a century and a half, Lutherans have worked together to meet the needs of their neighbors. New ministries and organizations develop continually as needs are identified. Staff mem-

bers and volunteers in these organizations treat acute and chronic illnesses of body and mind, provide care for the whole person in need, and strengthen and empower individuals and families to care for themselves, for one another, and for their communities.

- The two largest Lutheran denominations work together in health and human services through LSA.
- Services are available to all regardless of religious affiliation. In fact, the vast majority of people served by Lutheran social ministry organizations are not Lutheran.
- Lutheran organizations invite a wide variety of people to share in the work as employees, most not Lutheran.
- The 296 Lutheran organizations vary greatly in size and scope. One, for example, is counted among the ten largest providers of nursing home care in the country. Another has only a half-

dozen staff members.

- Collectively, LSA member organizations have budgets totaling more than \$8 billion, making LSA one of the largest not-for-profit organizations in the country.

Of course, these organizations are not alone in providing service. Local congregations are also active in providing food, shelter, education, mentoring, and a wide range of other services in their local communities.

