

DIALOG

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Out of the ordinary

When Hurricane Isabel's tidal surges inundated a number of eastern Maryland communities, several Lutheran congregations were at the forefront of relief efforts.

And *Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries* was there to help, as representative of national Lutheran Disaster Response. In many parts of its service territory,



Diakon serves as lead agency or in concert with other Lutheran organizations to represent the church in emergencies (see *TimeLines* on the back cover).

The response is typical of Diakon's willingness to go beyond its day-to-day services to aid those in need. In regional editions of this issue of *Dialog*, you will read about the Hospice Saint John staffer who, for 10 years, has helped those with breathing disorders to take otherwise impossible vacations . . . or of the staff of Penn Lutheran Village, who staged a range of innovative activities to raise funds for Diakon services, just two of many ways Diakon daily goes beyond the ordinary, to serve.

Dottie Coppell, who led volunteer efforts at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in eastern Baltimore County, hugs Charity Poling, whose home (below) was damaged by Hurricane Isabel.



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 is available for viewing on our Web site, www.diakon.org.

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A lament for not seeing 'the hidden'

At the November meeting of our board of directors, we reviewed a range of our services and asked two questions of ourselves:

Do the services we provide in that particular field distinguish us from other, similar organizations?

And what, if any, benevolent dollars should be assigned to those programs?

In other words, are the services we provide the ones people need, as opposed to simply want, and can we justify the fact we spend benevolent dollars on one program, but not on another?

It was not always a comfortable discussion.

The constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or ELCA, identifies one of the church's purposes as "serv[ing] in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs."

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries incorporates that call of the church within its own governance documents because it proclaims the heart of social ministry.

I have been privileged recently to sit on an ELCA roundtable in Chicago assigned the task of exploring how the church can be more public in its proclamation and its living out in public of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Central to these discussions is an understanding that God speaks with a particular bias in favor of the poor and the powerless. How are we then, Diakon and the rest of the church, doing in our ministry to

those to whom God shows this "bias"?

The answer is mixed. In individual instances, we do very well. But as a whole we are not doing as well.

Diakon is budgeted to provide approximately \$16 million in uncompensated care to people of all ages in 2004. That's a lot of money. But is it enough and is it being spent for social healing?

We proclaim that Diakon is about the task of helping to fulfill the conditions of Shalom (housing, food, community, vocation, and health) for God's people, which means for *all* people. But we must "be on to ourselves" and ask if our work is balanced as we seek to serve all people.

We are a predominantly very white, middle-class organization in terms of

those whom we serve and those who serve. I attribute this observation to both Diakon and the ELCA. No doubt many adults who are cared for by Diakon have limited resources. They are poor to many of us, but only relatively so compared to many others who go unseen in our communities and on our farms.

Our challenge as a national church—which wants to be more public—and to Diakon—which wants to spend its benevolent dollars where they are most needed—is to see those hidden poor—that is, the very poor—among us.

Our covenant with God, as his body on earth, is to see and hear the poor and powerless and bring to them God's Shalom. We need to use our privileged power—money and influence—to bring comfort and healing to those for whom God has a clear bias. We need to name the problems that keep people poor and powerless and seek ways together to hear and help them.

The job before our board and church is not easy. It will cause us to challenge some long-standing assumptions about the poor and powerless. It will force us to sit and speak with people with whom we may not be comfortable. It will cause us to look at every dollar we spend and every minute we expend and ask ourselves: Is this the best stewardship of limited resources?

And it will force us to confront ourselves and reflect on our view of God's world. It may cause us discomfort and some shame. But if we are to serve more fully the public around us, Diakon and the ELCA must begin with a personal and corporate lament for what we have failed to do in bringing Shalom to all of God's people.



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

Wilderness Center residence hall opens

With the capital campaign to fund its expansion nearing the original \$2 million mark, Diakon's **TresslerCare Wilderness Center** has opened its new residential facility and admitted the first female students to its Wilderness School program.

The facility, an expansion of an existing residence hall, houses up to 48 adjudicated youths, referred to the center by county juvenile probation offices or children and youth services from across Pennsylvania. While other Wilderness Center-based programs—the **Wilderness Challenge Course** and the **Weekend Alternative Program**—have served young women for some time, the residential school had been all-male until completion of the new residence hall.

In addition, a large greenhouse has been completed and will enable the expansion of the center's horticultural program, which will both provide training to students and a potential source of income.

The greenhouse is part of an innovative sewage-treatment system, built as part of the center's expansion. Effluent is treated underground and the purified water used as an irrigation source for plants in the greenhouse. The new facility includes a dirt floor, in which crops or plants may be grown.

A group touring the Wilderness Center learns about plans for the new greenhouse.



The Wilderness Center's new residential building.

While individuals, congregations, and corporations have responded favorably to the capital campaign, additional funds still need to be raised because of unanticipated costs in the range of \$400,000 for the sewage-treatment system, required because the land would not meet perk tests. The center's expansion also includes a new gymnasium/classroom building. Additional classrooms are needed to serve the center's growing population, while the gymnasium will enable more activities on campus; students must now be transported to local towns to participate in indoor sports or related activities.

Located on nearly 200 mountainous acres near Boiling Springs in Cumberland County, the Wilderness Center incorporates both short- and long-term residential programs, the weekend service, and the 31-day challenge course.

TimeLine: 1996

Continued from Back Cover

when tornadoes ripped through five northeastern Pennsylvania counties, causing death and millions of dollars in destruction.

LSN worked in partnership with the then-named Lutheran Services of the Lehigh Valley, the Lutheran Disaster Response representative in the region.

Lyons, following the 1998 tornado.



Address Service Requested

TIMELINE: 1996

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries' recent response to flooding in Maryland and Delaware is not the first time the organization has assisted in disasters.

During the 1990s, both of the agencies that created Diakon—Tressler Lutheran Services and Lutheran Services Northeast—helped local communities devastated by natural disasters.

In 1996, Tressler responded on behalf of the national Lutheran Disaster Response to provide assistance and grants to victims of flash flooding in Pennsylvania and western Maryland. The flooding took lives and caused millions of dollars in damage. Tressler's Office of Social Concerns coordinated agency relief efforts.

Two years later, Lutheran Services Northeast responded in a variety of ways—ranging from Volunteer Home Care coordination of donations, relief supplies, and various volunteer efforts to Family Life Services debriefing sessions—

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Rescue workers examine debris following flooding in Lycoming County, Pa., in 1996. Tressler Lutheran Services served as Lutheran Disaster Response agency.

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