

# Who Are The Lutherans?



And Why Did We  
Start So Many  
Social Ministry  
Organizations?

*Grace*



# Lutherans Live Forgiven

“Grace”—as in the famous American hymn “Amazing Grace”—is the most beloved Lutheran word. Grace, Lutherans believe, means that God loves us, even when we aren’t particularly lovable. Grace means we live forgiven.

Living forgiven means, for Lutherans, that we seek to serve our neighbors.

Deaconesses are a good example of “living forgiven.” The first Lutheran deaconesses came to the United States from Germany in the 1800s. They worked in schools, orphanages, and homes for the aged, among other roles. These women represent those who were among the first Christian ministers specifically dedicated to social work.



Albert Schweitzer—musician, theologian, medical missionary, and winner of the Nobel Prize in 1952—is another good example of “living forgiven.” Schweitzer put his Lutheran faith into practice through what he called “reverence for life.”

The Diakon Wilderness Center in Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania, is a social ministry program through which young people experience grace. The center works with young people deemed “at-risk” in and by society. At the center, young people overcome adversity and learn responsibility, accountability, and cooperation. In short, they learn to live forgiven.



# Lutherans Practice Faith As The Freedom To Love (No Matter What)

After “grace,” the most important Lutheran word is “faith” or “trust.” Lutherans put faith into practice in countless ways.

Faith means we sing! Lutherans love music. When we sing, we trust in the voices and talents of others to lift us all in love

Lutherans embody faith in healing. Most Lutherans today read the stories of Jesus’ healing in the Bible as encouragement to trust in medical sciences, nurses, doctors, and counselors.

Faith becomes active in the power of love. People who trust in the power of love can look directly at the reality of suffering in the world. For Lutherans, the world’s suffering is revealed in Jesus’ death on a cross. God took on human weakness and suffering in Jesus. In Easter, God’s power is revealed to be the power of love that not even death can conquer.

During the Reformation, Luther risked breaking his celibacy vows as a monk to marry Katharina von Bora. He and “Katie” experienced all the joys and sorrows of family life. In 1542, for instance, the couple lost their 14-year-old daughter, Magdalena, to death. Luther trusted that Magdalena would be saved, but he grieved for her, too.

This Lutheran spirit of faith-active-in-love, no matter what, is clear in the mission of Diakon Hospice Saint John.

Diakon Hospice Saint John provides care for the dying and support for the grieving. This social ministry builds on the philosophy of Dame Cicely Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement: “You matter because of who you are. You matter to the last moment of your life.” At Diakon Hospice Saint John, staff members practice freedom in faithful service to one another—even in the face of death.



## Lutheran Social Ministries —A Heritage Of Centuries And Continents Of Caring

Guided by the Holy Spirit who unites us all, Lutheran social ministries extend care to our neighbors regardless of race, gender, age, or other human differences. All are God's children. All are in need. All are called to care through what Lutherans describe as "vocations" or "callings."



Lutherans support social ministries through two church bodies. Founded in 1847, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) is the second-largest Lutheran denomination in the U.S., with 2.5 million members in 6,000 congregations. A "synod" is a free association of congregations; the word comes from the Greek "to walk together." LCMS members emphasize Biblical doctrine and faithfulness to historical Lutheran documents called *Confessions*.

Founded in 1988 from denominations that traced their roots to the earliest Lutheran settlers, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has 4.8 million members in 10,000 congregations. Like the LCMS, the ELCA claims a Lutheran confessional identity, but ELCA members collaborate more liberally with other Christian and interfaith partners. The ELCA also ordains women, unlike the LCMS.



Both churches provide support to social ministry organizations: Lutheran World Relief (LWR), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), and Lutheran Services in America (LSA). LSA is a network of roughly 300 health and human services organizations. In 2008, LSA agencies served one in 50 people in the United States!

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries is an active LSA member. The name "Diakon" reflects the Lutheran heritage of care. The Greek word "diakonia" means "one who serves."

That heritage of service is the heart of Diakon. It builds on centuries of vocations by former workers in agencies that now spread across continents. Their work—your work—our work, builds on centuries of living faith. Welcome to being part of that amazing and wonderful heritage.

*Martin Luther's experience of salvation by grace through faith triggered the Reformation, and changed the world.*

Lutherans take our name from Martin Luther (1483-1546). Today, more than 70 million people around the globe are "Lutherans."

Their stories—and the stories of the social ministries Lutherans established—are stories of living faith.



## Our Common Calling

Lutherans care. Lutherans also tend not to brag, because we feel everyone has a calling or vocation to care through family life, citizenship, and service to society.

For instance, beginning in the 1940s, Lutherans began establishing agencies to care for older adults. At today's Diakon Senior Living Communities, residents have access to a wide range of services to meet physical and spiritual needs. Employees in these ministries have the opportunity to put into practice the long Lutheran heritage of caring and compassion—our common calling.





Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries is a leading provider of senior living accommodations and social services, including adoption, counseling, home care, and youth programs, in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. With many hands and one heart, Diakon staff members each year touch the lives of thousands of children, families, and older adults. Diakon's mission is to respond to God's call to serve the neighbor, and Diakon staff members are proud to continue a more-than-140-year tradition of hospitality and care for people of all faiths.

#### **Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries**

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The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia is one of the eight seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, committed to preparing ordained and lay ministers of the Word as leaders for the mission of the church in the world. The seminary, located in the Mt. Airy section of Philadelphia, trains leaders from a number of traditions, including Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal, in addition to Lutheran. Both our student body and faculty come from diverse backgrounds, and our campus location in the midst of the diverse Mt. Airy community encourages engagement with the world.

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