

DIALOG

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Diakon Place project to revitalize Baltimore building, neighborhood

Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries' *KidzStuff* program is moving. But the program relocation, from 600 W. North Avenue to the northwest corner of the intersection of North Avenue and Broadway farther east in the City of Baltimore, represents more than a relocation.

It represents a rebirth for an abandoned building and the first step in hoped-for revitalization of an economically distressed neighborhood. Diakon is spending several million dollars to purchase and refurbish a building that will be known as *Diakon Place*.

Originally an auto center and later a supermarket, the complex features sufficient room for expanded day care services as well as additional Diakon family-focused programs, including *Diakon Family Life Services* and *Diakon Housing & Community Development*. In addition, Diakon will work with community, civic, and faith-based groups to determine additional potential uses of the property, which is currently vacant.

"In response to continuing facility-related issues at the current location of KidzStuff, we began an extensive search for a new

location," says Linda Ciampi, senior vice president for Diakon Family & Community Ministries.

"Our goal was to find a suitable site close to the existing center so that we could continue to serve our current clients to the extent possible, but also grow and serve additional children and families. The new site is strategically located so that parents from regional neighborhoods traveling downtown or toward Johns Hopkins Hospital for employment have convenient access to day care services."

Diakon staff members, Lutheran officials, and members of a local congregation tour the building that will become Diakon Place.

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LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES
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2006: 'Energizing expansion of ministry' presents many challenges, opportunities

The cover story of this issue of *Dialog* details an exciting development for Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries—the creation of a state-of-the-art child care center in what is currently a vacant building in an economically distressed area of Baltimore.

We view this project as more than simply relocating a program, but rather as a demonstration of our commitment to ministry to the broadest range of people. In putting several million dollars into this project, we hope to create a site—which we're calling *Diakon Place*—that can become a center of renewal for a very challenged neighborhood.

This effort is in addition to the work that the Rev. Stan Steele, who heads our *Diakon Housing & Development* program, is doing in rehabbing city homes in nearby neighborhoods within Baltimore (detailed in the lead article in the Delaware-Maryland edition of this newsletter).

This energizing expansion of ministry is a fitting way to end 2005 and begin 2006. The year just concluded has been an exciting, but also challenging, one for Diakon. I'm proud of the way our staff members have handled the changes that occurred last year, particularly as we sold freestanding health care centers at nine of our service locations in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

When we announced that sale, necessary because of the vast capital expenditures required to keep nearly two-dozen senior living communities in the condition our residents expect and deserve, we said we would upgrade our remaining senior living communities and expand our family and community ministries, with a goal of serving more people.

And that is exactly what we are doing.

While some of those projects are detailed in the various regional sections of this edition of *Dialog*, I want to emphasize several current developments and projects:

- In addition to the KidzStuff and Housing & Development efforts noted above, we're expanding our *Family Life Services* educational and congregational health ministries in Maryland.

- We've added a new congregational health ministries service to our *Family Life Services* program in Sussex County, Delaware.

- We've just announced a major expansion of senior living accommodations at our *Luther Crest* campus in Allentown. *Southgate at Luther Crest* will include a variety of homes designed to meet the varying needs of older adults.

- We also continue to study potential acquisitions to expand our number of continuum-of-care senior living communities.

- We recently received a contract from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to

administer, for a second five-year period, the *Statewide Adoption & Permanency Network*. In our first five-year period, we were very effective in expanding the scope and services of SWAN, serving thousands and thousands of children and families.

- We're in the midst of making rehabilitation-service and aesthetic upgrades at all of our continuum-of-care communities. And our capital budget for 2006 is more than triple what it typically averages, reflecting our commitment to quality accommodations and facilities.

- We're also ready to install new electric beds at all of our nursing care centers to improve resident lifestyle and enhance a culture of safety for our staff members.

- And we've undertaken market studies at all of our senior living communities to determine next steps for expansion and renovation. We've also just completed resident surveys to make sure the service we provide to them meets their needs and desires.

There is certainly reason to be excited. And yet, 2006 will have its challenges. Our significant expansion of capital funding, along with our continuing need to grow, will inform much of our development efforts in the coming year.

Yet these challenges—which are really possibilities—are faced for one reason only—to serve more and more people in need, to respond to God's love in Jesus Christ to serve the neighbor through acts of service. That is our role—to act, consistent with the meaning of our name, as "one assigned by the church to minister to the needs of others."

I invite you to join with us as we embark on the journey ahead of us in 2006, meeting new challenges as we find new opportunities to serve on your behalf.



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

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Pageant winner promotes adoption Personal experience influences platform

When 21-year-old Mallory Keith was growing up, she and her brothers would roll their eyes when they heard their mother say, “I have six kids—two adopted, four ‘homemade.’”

Because the adopted members of the Keith family have Down syndrome, many people would respond by telling her parents



exploring the world of adoption and opening their homes and hearts to children with special needs.”

Keith comes by her passion for adoption naturally. Her parents modeled this behavior from Day 1, adopting Annie and Abel as if they, too, were “homemade.” The two children were adopted through Tressler Adoption Services, now Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, in the mid-1980s.

“It actually turned out to be the smartest thing we ever did. I can’t imagine not having them,” says Patti Keith. “We never had a moment of burden. It has been the opposite.”

Because all the children were reared from infants, not one of them realized as they grew up that their family was any different from others in the neighborhood.

“My kids don’t know any different. They don’t think there is anything ‘weird’ about it at all,” says Mrs. Keith. “It is not something we dwell on, talk about, or remember half of the time.”

In fact, Mallory Keith says she doesn’t recall when she first realized that her brother and sister had special needs. She and her sister have always shared a room and are each other’s biggest supporters.

“I don’t have stories about things being difficult. It is what we did,” she says. “Now that I’m older and can look at it and know that my family is a little bit different, it makes me feel happy and blessed. Before, I just took it for granted.”

She capitalized on that realization in November when she won the title of Miss Greater Juniata Valley 2006. She will continue to spread her message of “Building Families Through Special Needs Adoptions,” when she heads to the Miss Pennsylvania pageant in June.

“What I want people to see is that having [children with special needs] in your life enriches your life,” she says. “If people can get a glimpse of what I get to experience, then maybe they will be interested in special needs adoptions.”

Left: Mallory Keith receives her crown. Below: Mallory gathers with her family following her crowning as Miss Greater Juniata Valley 2006. From left to right are her mother, Patti; her brothers Abel and Mitchell; her sister Annie, her grandmother, Cindy Misitano; Mallory; her father, Steve; and her brother Tucker. Mallory’s older brother, Dylan, was not able to be present at the pageant.

how special they were to share their homes with children who have special needs. But the praise never went to her parents’ heads, she says.

“The fact is they knew—and we kids knew as well—that our family is special,” she says. “But it’s not because of what we give Annie and Abel, it’s because of what they share with us.”

The young woman’s belief in special needs adoption proved helpful when she entered the Miss Central PA/Miss Greater Juniata Valley scholarship pageant this fall. The musical theatre major at Point Park University in Pittsburgh had to choose a platform that she understood and could readily support for the competition.

She chose adoption.

“This seemed really different, and it is something I really care about,” she says. “I think it is important to be passionate about what you are doing. My goal is to reach people so that they, too, may consider



Photographs courtesy of Matt Stricker and the Miss Central Pennsylvania Scholarship Pageant

Address Service Requested

Diakon, staff, residents respond to disasters

Each year, *Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries* serves more than 70,000 persons in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. Recently, however, that geography “expanded,” when Diakon and its staff members helped those in the Gulf Coast and around the world.

Early this year, in response to the tsunami that struck South Asia, Diakon contributed \$100,000 to Lutheran World Relief as well as matched staff gifts totaling \$13,671.

Recently, Diakon made an additional \$100,000 corporate contribution toward disaster-relief efforts—this time to Lutheran Disaster Response for its work in the aftermath of the hurricanes that hit Louisiana, Missouri, and environs. In addition, Diakon has matched \$50,000 in staff, resident, and client contributions to disaster relief organizations.

“Our very committed staff members, residents, and clients actually have given more than \$56,000 to Lutheran Disaster Response and other disaster-relief organizations,” says the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., Diakon president/CEO, “so our total hurricane

response so far represents more than \$200,000 in contributions.”

Diakon’s commitment to disaster response extended beyond contributions. The organization sent a work team to assist with clean-up efforts in Biloxi, Miss., and Rebecca Albright, Diakon disaster response director, later returned to the region to assist with administrative work.

“I had seen damage from the hurricanes that hit Florida last year, but this was different—homes lifted off their foundations, some homes were just crumbled to the ground, and there were boats everywhere,” says team member Joie Barry of Diakon’s Advancement office.

The devastation team member Chris Reider saw was something he will never forget. “When we first started to see the destruction, I was speechless. It is a sight you could never truly be completely prepared for no matter what type of course you take or how much you see on television.”

“Our time in Mississippi was tough, tiring, and fulfilling. I worked with a great team and it was wonderful to know we were able to have a hand in helping others in

so many ways and on so many levels in an area hit so hard and so under-reported by the press as a whole,” adds the Rev. David Heineman, another team member.

“This was the most positive experience of my life. To work so hard and be so appreciated is a great thing. I got hugs from strangers for doing simple things for them like helping load their car with food from the pantry,” adds Diakon staff member Johanna Gieroczynski. “The residents would say, ‘God bless you for coming to help us,’ but I think I was the one who was blessed to meet such incredible people.”



Chris Reider and Rebecca Albright clear Katrina debris.