

Dialog

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George & Pat Edsall

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*"We see kids trying to turn
their lives around and we try
and help them..."*

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Foster Care

*Aiding hundreds of
children and teens from
across Pennsylvania*

Story on page 5



Continuing the ministries of
The Lutheran Home at Topton,
Tressler Lutheran Services and
LWS of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The President's Dialog

Family

Few words create such different images in our minds.

Religious, political, and social leaders espouse the word as if it were a banner behind which every noble and moral idea can be gathered. During political campaigns in recent years the term has been dropped into speeches, commercials, and sound bites with reckless abandon.

When concepts such as “family values,” “strengthen the family,” or “the American family” are used, I wonder if the speakers really understand what they mean. In fact, I suspect that in today’s religious, political, and social arenas, there is no shared meaning or understanding of the word “family.”

I also suspect that the word is used so frequently because public leaders believe the public “feels good” when they talk about family. Indeed, a lack of definition for the word bestows it with more power than clear understanding might. This can cheapen the word in our public discourse and contribute to an environment in which people are left to wonder if “non-traditional” families are really families at all.

Nostalgically, we think of a mother, a father, and children as being the picture-perfect family. Yet there are many single-parent, single-grandparent, and other kinds of non-traditional families in our communities and churches. My reading of history and of the Bible tells me that there has always been an array of relationships that constitute healthy families. A healthy family exists not because an assortment of particular types of individuals—two parents, a few children—

is present, but wherever people create a “community” of love in a home.

One of the gifts Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries has as a faith-based organization is the ability to point to the source of that community—God in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God loves, nurtures, and forgives us—and calls and empowers us to live out that love, nurture, and forgiveness in the relationships with which we are blessed.

Families that model this kind of loving community share five important characteristics.

Respect is paramount. Respect is grounded in the belief that each and every person is a unique child of God. When people act with decency and regard for one another at home and in public, they demonstrate respect. Modeling respect within the family is the basis for showing respect for others in public.

Support is a characteristic many of our grandmothers taught us as children. God gives us people to share with us the burdens and the joys of our lives. Family members love us, and sometimes carry us, through both good and bad times.

Fidelity is faithfulness in a relationship. God models this faithfulness in His constant and steadfast care for us and for creation throughout history. Fidelity includes sexual fidelity as well as what we say at home and in the community about members of our family.



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

DIAKON UNIVERSITY

It has no hallowed halls or caps and gowns, but Diakon University is making its mark in education.

Love has become such a common word, but it is the very foundation on which a family is built. This type of love is never conceited, never haughty, and never proud. Love does not mean that family members do not teach and correct each other. It means they do so in a different way, a way that begins and ends with the commitment that the relationship is more important than appearance, ideas, or behavior.

Forgiveness is needed by all of us, because everyone makes mistakes. The forgiveness families share with one another is rooted in the forgiveness of God, the new beginnings we are continually given. Forgiveness is a two-way street. Offering forgiveness is one component. Accepting responsibility and therefore accepting forgiveness is the other component. Most important, the offer of forgiveness in a family is constant.

At Diakon, we work with families of many types and in many circumstances. No matter what the service, adoption or counseling or care for older persons, our goal is to help families nurture, or in some cases gain, these skills, so that they are indeed families in the truest sense of the word.

The Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D.

A cutting-edge training program, Diakon University initially will focus on improving training and the work environment for nursing assistants—those who provide direct care.

And while employee morale and retention are key goals of “Diakon U,” its primary outcome will be continued top-flight care for residents of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries’ nursing centers. Later, the program will be expanded to offer other educational opportunities to disciplines and staff throughout the agency.

“We are very pleased to offer Diakon University, which should have a significant impact on the lives of many of those who provide direct care to our residents, as well as

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Yvonne Barnes, certified nursing assistant at Frey Village and graduate of the Diakon University pilot project, provides care to a village resident.

Pat & George Edsall

Enjoy the challenges of life.

Recently, that spirit netted the Carlisle, Pa., couple significant recognition.

The Edsalls received the Outstanding Foster Family award from the Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association for 23 years of service as foster parents to more than 800 children and youths.

Their efforts go beyond the typical care required in a foster home. The Edsalls serve as short-term emergency, disciplinary, and respite-care providers for youths. They truly enjoy working with children and do it for very personal reasons.

“I was raised in a sort of broken home,” says George Edsall. “This is a way to give the love that I didn’t get to kids in the same situation.”

“The Edsalls get kids under the worst circumstances,” explains Craig Smith, director of Diakon’s community-based youth services. “They provide time out when a kid is misbehaving in another home and needs to get away. And they take emergency placements when a child needs placed that same day.

“This is a very valuable service because they tell us the kinds of behaviors they’re

seeing with that child and they can tell us what kind of foster parents the child needs—a strict family or one focused more on nurturing.”

The couple is available on-call and has frequently responded in the middle of the night to pick up a runaway child or to reach out to a youth who has lost control.

“They have the amazing ability to tailor the experience of the foster child placed with them to meet the child’s needs—whether it be temporary nurturing and care or behavioral adjustment issues,” says Nina Poe, intake manager for Diakon’s TresslerCare foster care component.

While the Edsalls don’t provide long-term care for the foster children they receive, they do impact kids’ lives in significant ways and reap many rewards.

“We see kids trying to turn their lives around and we try and help them,” says George Edsall. “It’s rewarding and we’ve had a lot of precious moments, a lot of memories. Some kids come back to see us after 22 years. We just hang in there, do our best and hope to succeed.”

The state award confirms that success.



Foster Care

In Diakon, Topton and Tressler programs continue heritage of service to children



For decades, the foster care programs of The Lutheran Home at Topton and TresslerCare have been aiding hundreds of children and teens from across Pennsylvania.

Now, as part of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, the programs are working in unity as they share a common mission of aiding children and youths in need.

“We’re working through Diakon to bring a unified and expanded service to the counties whose children and youths we serve,” says Craig Smith, executive director of community-based youth services for Diakon.

“TresslerCare redesigned its fost/adopt services to reflect Topton’s

long-standing and proven service-delivery model, while the Topton-based service is engaged in expanding its foster care service to include treatment foster care,” he says.

Designed to help kids find permanency within a family, the fost/adopt program places children with foster families whose intention is to adopt the child if parental rights are terminated. This approach results in fewer disruptions in care, as well as a permanent home for the child.

The most intensive type of foster placement, treatment foster care provides children and adolescents with a variety of therapies, including individual, group, and family counseling.

Foster Care

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The program has enjoyed success because of its on-staff therapists who provide almost immediate behavioral care to both the foster child and family.

“When we arrange a placement, we will have a counselor available within a week,” says Smith. “Foster parents bring their child in every week—that’s four agency contacts a month just through counseling, in addition to those made by our case managers.”

“We’re working through Diakon to bring a unified and expanded service to the counties whose children and youths we serve.”

In other systems, children and teens may have to visit a physician to use their Medical Assistance card for referral into a mental-health network—resulting in an extensive delay in treatment.

“Offering treatment foster care across the system will help us to reach even more children in need,” notes Trudy Weller, foster care director at The Lutheran Home at Topton.

As the programs combine resources, families and case managers will benefit from the increased number of tools available to them. In addition to foster care, youth services within Diakon include wilderness challenge courses, residential Wilderness School, Weekend Alternative Program, and much more.

David and Lisa Saul have served as foster parents for children through Foster Care Services of The Lutheran Home at Topton. Their children are now adopted. David is holding Devon, while the other children, in foreground left to right, are Ariel, Gabrielle, and Michael.



This range of services, says Smith, allows case managers options when behavioral issues arise. For example, “they have the option of sending a child on the 31-day wilderness challenge course rather than discharging him or her from foster care.”

The wilderness course challenges youths, while helping them to learn self-discipline and improve self-esteem. The weekend program, as another option, provides structured activities Friday through Sunday as a respite for caregivers or for those teens in other placement during the week.

“Many more children will benefit from the more extensive services provided through the combined efforts of The Lutheran Home at Topton and TresslerCare,” says Weller.

Foster Parents Always In Demand

An obstacle Diakon's foster care services face almost daily is finding enough foster families.

"One of our challenges is to keep qualified families ready so that we can meet kids' needs and match families," says Nina Poe, intake manager. "We get at least eight to ten referrals a week and need more families to meet that demand."

Families, she says, often have the misconception they must be "perfect" to qualify as a foster family. While certain basic standards and background checks are required, the foster programs offer continual training and support. The foster care programs solicit information, study a family's background and interests, and examine leisure activities to match the right child with the right family.

"Deciding to become a foster family is a major life consideration like having a baby or buying a house," says Craig Smith, executive director of community-based youth services for Diakon. "We want to ensure the right fit, matching the foster parents' strengths with the child's needs."

Foster parents are expected to participate in the approval process, which includes a family profile, clearances, references and DPW foster home requirements. In addition, foster parents attend training classes, ensure that the foster child's emotional and physical needs are met, participate in treatment planning, school meetings, and counseling if necessary, and transport the foster youth to sessions.

In return, the programs provide parental support, 24-hour access to staff through a paging system, a monthly non-taxable reimbursement per child, and access to Medical Assistance to cover the child's medical and dental needs.

Perhaps, add long-time foster parents, the greatest return is gratitude from a child or children in need.

If you are interested in learning more, please contact Foster Care Services of The Lutheran Home at Topton at (610) 682-1504 or TresslerCare youth services at (717) 795-0320.

DIAKON NEWS

Diakon's newest retirement facility opened in March.

*P*ocono Lutheran Village in East Stroudsburg, Pa., is offering assisted living services in 80 units.

The facility boasts amenities such as resident dining facilities, a library with gas fireplace, fitness/rehab room, chapel, beauty parlor, a large multi-purpose room, and laundry facility. In addition, both the second and third floors feature country kitchens with specific themes. The second floor allows residents to enjoy a deli-style eatery, while the third floor features an ice cream parlor.

Assisted living facilities such as Pocono Lutheran Village provide assistance with activities of daily life, but also allow residents to maintain the highest quality of life and independence possible and include a full range of activities and social events. On-site staff members help residents as needed with such activities as dressing, personal hygiene, exercise, and medication monitoring.



New Medical Arts at Luther Crest

The newest enhancement to the Luther Crest campus in Allentown is the result of a cutting-edge partnership between Medical Associates of the Lehigh Valley and Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries.

Involving Lutheran Services Northeast prior to the creation of Diakon, the partnership resulted in LSN's construction of the Medical Arts Building at Luther Crest. Opening last fall, the building houses a range of medical specialists and services.

"Our unique partnership with MATLV has brought first-class health care services onto the Luther Crest campus, resulting in a range of services for our residents as well as the Allentown community," says the Rev. Daun E. McKee, Ph.D., Diakon president/CEO.

Medical Associates of the Lehigh Valley—or MATLV—occupies the entire second floor of the building for administrative space, a lab, comprehensive health assessment suite, and two practices: Lehigh Valley Internists and Adult Medicine & Geriatrics. In addition, MATLV has leased space on the first floor housing independent, credentialed diagnostic and ancillary services including mammography, MRI, x-ray, ultrasound, CT scans, and stress testing.



Valley Sports & Arthritis Surgeons, an orthopedic practice, leases space on the first floor. Valley Sports' specialties include general orthopedics, sports medicine, joint reconstruction and replacement, and trauma and fracture care. Valley Sports also leases a large suite for physical therapy.

While the third floor of the building is not yet leased, a number of serious inquiries are being received for this space.

Some Luther Crest residents are now using physicians housed in the facility, with the doctors granted privileges in the facility's nursing care center, allowing them to follow residents from hospital stays to discharge back to Luther Crest.

"With the opening of the ancillary services suite, our residents have unparalleled on-site access to the latest in diagnostic technology," notes McKee.

Adoption Grant in Maryland

Tressler Adoption Services of Maryland has received a three-year contract from the state of Maryland that helps to fund adoptive placements of children from the state.

Set to begin April 1, "this contract is a huge step forward in our placement of Maryland children for adoption," says Ramona Hoyle, director of the Baltimore-based program. "This funding will help to bring permanency for Maryland's children who wait for families."

Tressler Adoption Services of Maryland is one of four adoption components within Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries. The others are Adoption Services of The Lutheran Home at Topton and Tressler Adoption Services of Central Pennsylvania and of Delaware.

Maryland Congregational Health Ministries

A partnership between Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Baltimore and Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries has brought congregational health ministries to the Delaware-Maryland Synod.

The new program is partly modeled on a highly successful parish-nurse health and healing ministry developed by Lutheran Shared Ministry in Williamsport, Pa., in concert with Diakon's community ministries there.

In addition, in concert with Tressler Lutheran Community Ministries, Baltimore, the congregational program may eventually include two components originated by The Lutheran Home at Topton, whose ministries are also continued through Diakon. Those additional services are Congregational Advocacy and Volunteer Home Care.

"The key to this program," says Bettye Wolinski, program director, "is that it will enable congregations to develop high-quality holistic health ministries, regardless of their size or budget."

The partnership with Prince of Peace, Philadelphia Road in Rosedale, provides free office space for the program staff person, allowing the creation of a central communication center for all parish nurse and congregational health ministries within the synod. Wolinski works part-time as the congregation's parish nurse and part-time directing the new congregational health ministries service.

Congregational Advocates are persons, based in congregations, who assist church and community members, particularly older persons, to maneuver the changing health-

care system and options. Volunteer Home Care develops congregationally based volunteer teams who provide short- and intermediate-term non-professional assistance to individuals and families in need, including transportation to medical appointments, meal preparation, errands, and outdoor chores.

Growth Planed For Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village

The campus of Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village at Lewisburg, Pa., is going through a growth phase—actually, six phases to be more precise.

Efforts are under way to add 68 units to the present 62 residences within The Cottages, Buffalo Valley's retirement-living accommodations. The project will be completed in six phases over several years.

Executive Director Kathy Herter is pleased with the interest the expansion has generated, with numerous cottages already sold in not only the first phase, but also in future phases. At least one future resident learned of the expansion through Diakon's web site.

The new cottages are complete with garages and back patios, with the option of converting the patio into a screened porch or Florida room.

In addition, the village plans to construct a campus-based community center, possibly with a pool, library, and computer room. To be funded through a capital campaign, the facility will be built on the western section of the campus.

"It's very rewarding that people in our community have encouraged this expansion. We are doing this on their behalf and building in a location they want," says Herter.

DIAKON UNIVERSITY

Continued from page 3

the residents themselves,” says Mark T. Pile, Diakon’s chief operating officer.

“In providing this program, not only are we differentiating ourselves from other employers in the health-care field, but we’re also doing something very beneficial for our staff and especially those for whom we care,” adds Timothy D. Johnson, executive director of The Village at Robinwood, a Diakon joint-venture campus, who led efforts to create Diakon U.

Industry-wide, 40 percent of persons who become certified nursing assistants leave the job before their 90-day probationary period is over. Developed through a partnership with the Institute for Caregiver Education, Chambersburg, Pa., a nationally recognized organization that focuses on training for front-line caregivers, Diakon University was created to shatter this statistic.

“...not only are we differentiating ourselves from other employers in the health-care field, but we’re also doing something very beneficial for our staff and especially those for whom we care.”

Diakon University not only offers care training, but also emphasizes wellness as opposed to just treating illness.

The program is being offered at all agency facilities and consists of four levels of training. It meets all federal and state-required training guidelines.

Level one is a series that blends the institute’s career-development program with

Alice Teti enjoys spending a moment with Henry Health Care Center resident Sarah Kneeream. A certified nursing assistant and staff member of The Lutheran Home at Topton for more than 20 years, Teti recently received an award from the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association for her tireless dedication to caring for persons with Alzheimer’s disease.



existing Diakon nursing assistant training to increase new-employee retention. Level two addresses needs of older persons as well as depression, nutrition, cognitive impairment, and behavioral concerns.

The third level examines aspects of aging and common disorders of the elderly. It also covers clinical information including systems of the human body, emotional and social changes, sensory needs, and infection.

Level four focuses on mentoring skills and will be offered to train nursing assistants to serve as mentors to other caregivers.

“Our goal is not only to provide the highest quality of care by having the best-trained staff, but also to make our work place interesting and exciting, to make it a place people want to work,” says Pile.

Scout Enhances Campus

A Luzerne County teenager's dedication to service has enhanced the lives of residents of Diakon's Hazleton, Pa., retirement community.

As part of a community service project to earn his Eagle Scout award, Matt Derr, 16, of Drums, Pa., built Eagle's Nest Park on the grounds of Saint Luke Manor, Saint Luke Pavilion, and Amity Village.

"When I was choosing my project, my aunt suggested this and I thought it was a good idea," says the Scout. "I enjoy working outside and lots of people will be able to enjoy it."

The park is built around a central water garden surrounded by benches, trees, and landscaping. The young man completed

the landscaping by securing donated materials from local businesses. His father, a general contractor, provided guidance to make sure the garden was accessible to persons with disabilities.

Derr was honored at a park dedication and blessing in late fall of 2000.



Continuing the ministries of The Lutheran Home at Topton Tressler Lutheran Services, and LWS of Northeastern Pennsylvania

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.

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