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Partners

A Resource for Church Leaders from Diaconal Ministries Canada

Stories of faith

When was the last time you read Hebrews 11? It's the chapter that tells the stories of faith, of those who were certain of what they did not see, of where God was leading them and calling them to lead.

Maybe read this chapter again –but, this time, think of the names and stories of deacons, past and present, that might be added to this list of faithful leaders. “By faith,” deacons respond with care and compassion in situations that are uncomfortable or layered with pain. “By faith,” deacons address injustices and offer themselves to the ministry of mercy. Every deacon could share stories of how s/he has served through faith.

So, what about these stories? They are more than important reminders to live by faith. Hebrews 12 makes it

clear that these stories are also for our encouragement –to compel us and to propel us forward to live out our stories in a similar fashion.

This issue of Partners is meant to do just that. You will read just 2 of countless stories of deacons living out their calling “by faith.” These stories are for you. To encourage you. To compel you to step out in faith and add your story. So that, in turn, you may encourage others.

If, by reading these stories, you become more aware of the challenges and struggles of your own diaconate, DMC's mission and passion is to serve you through encouragement and equipping. E-mail us today or look on our website for resources. Your Classis' Diaconal Ministry Developer is also willing to come to your church to meet with your diaconate.

Willing to listen, learn

By Mike Vander Kooi

When I was first asked to be a deacon at our church, I said “yes,” even though I really had no idea what being a deacon meant, or what a deacon actually did. I felt unqualified to help anybody dealing with poverty. However, by God's grace, I do not feel that way anymore.

A few months after I became a deacon, I went to give a grocery certificate to a gentleman. I ended up speaking with him for a while, and learned about who he was, where he lived and what his life was like. After, as I was walking back →

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DMC RESOURCE: Deacons on the Move

Through exercises specifically geared to deacons, Deacons on the Move is a workbook that challenges diaconates to look at their role and function, and it equips and empowers each deacon to serve through her/his unique passions and gifts to

engage the church in community ministry.

It may be downloaded FREE from the DMC website at

• www.diaconalministries.com/resources/pworkbooks.html



An answer to prayer

By Linda Weening

As a first-time deacon in my first year, and with just a month under my belt as chairperson, I was presented with a difficult challenge.

A young man in our neighbourhood needed to be in London for a medical test by 8:30 the following morning. He had explored a number of ways to get there, but nothing worked out. As a last resort, a friend with a distant connection to First Church in London suggested he try asking us for help.

We decided to buy him a train ticket, but wondered if we should do this. Was this a genuine need or just a young man who wanted to get to London for a party tonight? How could we tell? How do we decide? Has First Church gained a reputation of being an easy mark for scams?

A few phone calls to other deacons, a few prayers, a few thoughts (such as, would we rather be known as an easy mark or as a stingy church, unwilling to help?), and the decision was made. I would pick him up, drive him to the station, buy his ticket and send him on his way to London.

As I nervously walked out to my car, I prayed, "Lord, are we doing the

right thing here?" I turned on the car and immediately received an answer. This is what I heard from the new CD in the player: "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured to you." I shed a tear, sent up a "Thank you, Lord" prayer, and, much calmer, picked up this stranger.

How did this CD happen to be in my player and queued up to this song at that moment? I firmly believe that God led me to find that CD at a local thrift store and put it in the CD player.

The young man thanked me profusely as we drove to the station. I shared with him some of our misgivings and concerns and then played the song for him. I asked him just to thank the Lord and remember to help someone else when he could.

Throughout the rest of my term as deacon I kept this in mind whenever a difficult decision was called for. God wants me to know that He is in control. We only need to be faithful. PRAISE GOD!

Linda Weening is a member of First CRC, Sarnia, Ontario.



Your Story Goes Here!

DMC wants to hear your story! Please share with us what is happening in your church and community.



By telling us your story, we can post it on our website and encourage other deacons and churches.

• E-mail mmantel@crcna.org.

Or join the conversation about deacons, their calling, their joys and struggles on "The Network": an on-line, CRC-wide conversation about the "nuts and bolts of doing ministry." It may be found at

• <http://network.crcna.org>.

GOOD MEASURE Pressed down Shaken Together running over

Listen and learn...

→ to my van, it became clear to me then that my role as a deacon is to help people—people God created—and I don't need to be a poverty expert to do that. I need to be willing to listen and learn.

Part of this learning has come from my fellow deacons. As a diaconate we have committed to reading and discussing one chapter each month from *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. This book outlines principles that we have been able to apply in our community. For example, it is easy to give a handout, but it does not really help

someone get out of poverty in the long term. As a diaconate, we are no longer simply giving out food vouchers, but are more willing to sit and discuss a person's situation.

We have also had several deacons attend a poverty workshop, hosted by our local Children's Aid Society. When those deacons presented the material to our diaconate, we learned that those in a cycle of poverty have distinct cultural experiences, speak a different language, and use a different vocabulary than other social classes. This information

is invaluable because we are middle-class individuals who are not specifically trained in how to assist the poor.

All these things have helped us be more compassionate, more understanding, and less judgmental. I am thankful that I know now what a deacon does and I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to serve with such a great diaconate and learn about how God can use us to help those in need.

Mike Vander Kooi is a member of Fellowship Church in St. Thomas, Ontario.