

Bishop's Message for February 2012

My message this month is occasioned by the passing in December, 2011 of Sr. Frieda Kiel, deaconess, who completed her active ministry prior to the birth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada but who was rostered by a special motion of the ELCIC in convention in 1995. Sr. Frieda was not the first, nor the only, deaconess in our church. We have more. They quietly serve without drawing a lot of attention to themselves. Perhaps that is why most of us in the pews have that questioning look in our eyes when we hear about our Lutheran deaconesses. They may be few and far between, but they are among us and we want to affirm their ministry.

In the month of February, we are invited to celebrate the life and ministry of Sr. Elizabeth Fedde, deaconess. Her commemoration is marked on February 25th. Why? In the first place, she is remembered for her ministry's sake. In the second place, the church needs to be educated about the role the deaconess community has played for more than a century – both in the churches of western Europe and also in North America. Here is a bit of Sr. Elizabeth's story. She was born in Norway, and took her deaconess training at the Lovisenberg Deaconess House under the supervision of Mother Katinka Guldberg. Elisabeth spent much of her early career in [Troms](#). On her thirty-second birthday, Sister Elisabeth received a letter from her brother-in-law Gabriel Fedde challenging her to set up a ministry in [New York City](#) for Norwegian seamen there. She departed for the [United States](#) three months later and arrived in 1883.

Sister Elisabeth firmly established her work beginning on April 19 of the same year with the founding of the Norwegian Relief Society. In the beginning, the Relief Society was a boarding house with three small rooms rented for a price of \$9 per month and located near the [Seaman's Church](#). Sister Elisabeth also made significant efforts at visiting the sick and distressed, often writing in a journal about her experiences.

In 1885, Fedde opened a deaconess house for the training of other women to help in her ministry. Originally, the house consisted of a nine bed hospital that ultimately became [Lutheran Medical Center of Brooklyn](#). After remaining in New York for several years, she left at the request of Lutherans in [Minnesota](#) to come and minister to them. She arrived in [Minneapolis](#) in 1888 and established the Lutheran Deaconess Home and Hospital of the [Lutheran Free Church](#) the next year and helped plan for a third hospital in [Chicago](#). Eventually experiencing a burn-out (perhaps understandably) Sister Elisabeth returned to Norway in 1895 to Ola Sletteb, a suitor whom she had left to conduct her missionary work. The two were married shortly after her return. Elisabeth died on February 25, 1921. We remember Sr. Elizabeth, Sr. Frieda, the deaconess community, and all the unsung saints who from their labors rest, on February 25th. Blessed be their memories!

+Ronald B. Mayan, Bishop
Synod of Alberta and the Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada