

A Brief History

The Order of Deaconesses was established in 1908 by action of the 34th General Assembly. This action was taken on recommendation of a committee which had studied two overtures submitted to the 1907 Assembly: one from the Presbytery of Winnipeg which requested that the General Assembly

“take steps to set apart an order of women who shall be known as deaconesses; who shall serve the church as nurses, parish visitors, dispensers of charity and in any other way that may prove desirable.”

and one from the Presbytery of Toronto which, at the request of the Board of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, overtured the General Assembly that the constitution of the Ewart Missionary Training Home which had been established in 1897 be broadened in its scope and support and that the Assembly

“approve at the same time some method by which graduates may be specially designated by the Church when entering their work.”

Since 1908 members have served in a variety of capacities in response to the needs identified by the Church and in stewardship of the individual gifts given by God. In the past Deaconesses served as evangelists, nurses, teachers, and missionaries in Canada and overseas. In the early part of the twentieth century when there were few social agencies, many members of the Order served in health and social services. As social agencies developed, the need for this aspect of diaconal work diminished. During the 1950’s and 60’s, the focus shifted to Christian Education, and many diaconal workers filled this position. In the 1970’s and 80’s the emphases broadened again, and members served as Church Educators, Hospital Visitors, Pastoral Assistants, Home and Overseas Missionaries, Administrators and Area Educational Consultants.

In 1984 the Order of Deaconesses became the Order of Diaconal Ministries at which time men were admitted to the Order. In the 1990’s and into the 21st century, members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries continued to serve the Church in a variety of capacities.

For over 100 years the Order of Diaconal Ministries has served the Church of Jesus Christ. Diaconal Ministry continues to be a need in the Church and the Order of Diaconal Ministries is open to change and ready to respond in service. We are confident that under God’s leading avenues for service will continue to be discovered and in response faithful service offered.