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Deaconess Orders

Summary

Although their story is old as the Christian Church and as varied as the denominations of that church, deaconesses have always been associated with outreach work aimed at offering spiritual an pastoral guidance. Protestant equivalents of the Catholic sisterhood, deaconesses in the modern era are trained and paid Christian workers who assist in the ministry of the church. Although duties and training have varied across denominations and historical and cultural settings, there has been one constant theme. Historically, deaconesses in Australia have brought the gospel of Jesus Christ and provided Christian care to disadvantaged people.

Details

The nineteenth century deaconess movement grew from a recognised need to formally develop and promote the ministry of women, particularly in caring for the sick, the poor and needy. Pastor Theodore Fliedner, who in 1836 revived the diaconate of women in Kaiserwerth, Germany, is generally regarded as the person responsible for reviving the tole and establishing the first, formal training institute

By 1892, the evangelical churches of England, Scotland, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden and Norway had institutions which equipped women for Christian ministry through the lay order of deaconesses. Florence Nightingale was particularly influential in bringing the deaconess movement from Germany to England.

Churchwomen and men familiar with the development of the European movement migrated to Australia in the 1880s and 1890s and helped to fuel interest in establishing deaconess orders in the south-eastern corner.

Published resources

Booklet
A History of the Methodist Deaconess Order in South Australia, Hancock, Bethany, 1995

Book
Not to be ministered unto: The story of Presbyterian deaconesses trained in Melbourne, Ritchie, Catherine I., 1998

God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia, O'Brien Anne, 2005

Caught for Life: The Story of the Anglican Deaconess Order in Australia, Tress, Nora, 1993

The Presbyterians in Australia., Burke, David and Hughes, Philip, 1996

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