

# A HISTORY OF THE FUND *for* THE DIACONATE *of the* EPISCOPAL CHURCH *in the* UNITED STATES\*

**THE HISTORY OF THIS FUND** was compiled from a booklet published in 1940, and relates the beginning of the Retiring Fund for Deaconesses. The outstanding feature of the Fund is that it was begun by the deaconesses and carried out by them alone until its capital reached fifty thousand dollars. Administration was handled by members of the Order of Deaconesses until recently, when the membership was opened to all deacons (female and male, in good standing with their Bishop); with the Board of Directors now including both men and women deacons.

For several years prior to 1926, it was evident that the small emergency fund maintained by the National Conference of Deaconesses was insufficient to assist the number of deaconesses who would need security for the future, either because of their retirement from active service or through disability. A few had private income, several were taken care of by their parishes, and graduates of the Philadelphia Training School had a pension system which had to be supplemented. No general fund was available for the others.

When the Church Pension Fund was established by the General Convention in 1913 no provision was made to include deaconesses and it seemed unlikely that any change could be expected in that regard, although Lambeth Conference in 1930 and General Convention in 1931 both declared, That the Order of Deaconesses is for women the one and only Order of Ministry which we can recommend our branch of the Catholic Church to recognize.

This situation was uppermost in everyone's mind when The National Conference of Deaconesses met at St. Faith's House, New York, on September 29, 1926. When it was resolved that a Retiring Fund

should be created, Deaconess Mary A. Crosby pledged the first hundred dollars and an offering taken up from the twenty-two deaconesses present amounted to \$94.25. The president of the Conference appointed a committee to arrange for the incorporation of the fund.

**ON SEPTEMBER 30, 1927**, at another meeting in the Library at St. Faith's House, the committee presented the Certificate of Incorporation and the by-laws prepared by the Chancellor of the Diocese of New York. The seven members of the executive committee of The National Conference of Deaconesses signed the Certificate of Incorporation along with more than fifty deaconesses. On the same day the Certificate of Incorporation was approved by the Supreme Court of New York and The Retiring Fund for Deaconesses of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America came into being.

The purpose for which the corporation was formed, as set forth in its certificate of incorporation, is as follows: The establishment, care and maintenance of a fund, the income of which shall be used to provide annuity or allowance to Deaconesses of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America in good standing according to the Canon of the Church who on their retirement from active service shall have insufficient provisions for their needs. In April 1990, after the by-laws' changes were approved by two-thirds of the membership, the Retiring Fund was opened to male deacons. In 1998 the name was changed to the Fund for the Diaconate to better reflect the Fund's mission and focus.

**TODAY, THE OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS OF THE CORPORATION** consist of a president, vice president, secretary, assistant secretary, and treasurer. These

officers include both deacons and lay persons, and are elected for one year at the Annual Meeting of the Corporation in October, taking office when elected. The board of directors, of which there are nine positions are filled by deacons, elected for terms of three years, three each year at the Annual Meeting in October, and also take office when elected.

The Annual Meeting of the Corporation is held in October. Members of the Corporation entitled to vote are all ordained deacons in the Episcopal Church in the United States who are canonically resident in a diocese. The board also meets for its annual meeting in October, with a semi-annual meeting held in May. In 2011, for the first time a deacon was elected as president of The Fund. The spring 2014 meeting of the Board of Directors began a planning process to explore how the Fund might broaden its ways of assisting deacons.

**THE FUND PERFORMS A VITAL SERVICE FOR OUR CHURCH** by assisting deacons—working, retired or disabled—who have insufficient funds for their needs. The Fund is administered by its board of directors and executive committee. Funds are distributed by periodic allowances based on individual needs. Special grants are made to cover emergencies, such as illness, dental care, disaster relief or other special needs.

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\* Originally titled, *The Retiring Fund for the Women in the Diaconate of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States.*