



Deaconess Harriet Bedell

1875 - 1969 Feast Day: January 8

Bird Woman | *Woman who Prays*



Deaconesses

2nd Wave of the Diaconate
in The Episcopal Church

1857-1970





Baltimore Deaconesses

“Deaconesses are an old religious community, dating to the earliest days of the church,” said Keith McCoy, President of the Fund for the Diaconate. In about 500 they “faded away” in the Western Church but were re-established in the early 1800s as part of the Lutheran social-gospel movement in Kaiserwerth, Germany.

In the Episcopal Church, this movement started in **September 1857** in Baltimore with six women: Adeline Blanchard Tyler, Catherine Minard, Carrie Guild, Evaline Black, and two others whose names are unknown.

[Link to an article on history of deaconesses](#)

A few more resources

[Fund for the Diaconate](#)

[Sisters in Faith website](#)

[Video on the history of the diaconate](#)
(section on deaconesses)

Video [“A Life Beloved” \(Deaconess Anna Alexander\)](#) (10 min.)

From the website of the Fund for the Diaconate's [page on Deaconesses](#):

“Episcopal Deaconesses Feast Day - September 22

General Convention 2022 passed Resolution A008, authorizing this commemoration for trial use for the triennium 2021-2024; in Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2018.

“The Episcopal deaconess movement describes a ministry of women who were set apart for service by their bishops, beginning in 1857 and ending with the ordination of women as deacons, authorized by General Convention in 1970.

“Episcopal deaconesses joined a wider, multi-denominational movement that began in Europe in the 19th century. [Read the full text.](#)”

Collect

O God of love, we bless you for calling and equipping the deaconesses of the Episcopal Church, who served your people at risk or in need, at home and throughout the world. With grateful hearts we honor their hard work, perseverance, and leadership in following Jesus into places of suffering or hardship, injustice or un-championed hope. May we, like them, bear the light of Christ to all people with humility and grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Timeline

1906

Age 31
Enrolled in
NY Training
School for
Deaconesses

Active in ministry into her 80s

Born in
Buffalo, NY
March 19,
1875

Missionary
teacher in
Oklahoma

Sent to
Alaska
1916

Set apart as
Deaconess
1922
Age 47

Moved to
Florida
1932

Officially
retired
1938?
Age 63

Hurricane
Donna
1960

Died
Jan 8,
1969
Age 93

New York Training School for Deaconesses



Procession of Deaconess candidates, NYC, 1914

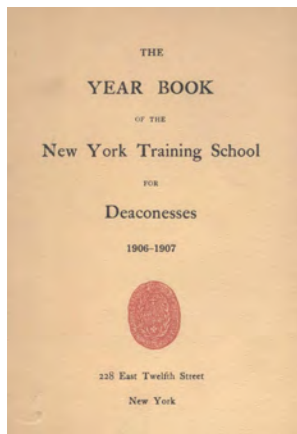
2-year course of study

TABULAR VIEW—JUNIOR YEAR

Day	9.00-10.15	10.30-11.20	11.30-12.20	AFTERNOON
Monday	Study	Church History	Creeds	*Electives
Tuesday	"	{ Psalms Art of Teaching	Biblical History	Work is also assigned in one or more of the following branches: Parochial and City Mission Work. Clinic, Guild and Club Work. Bookkeeping, Cooking and Fine Laundry Work.
Wednesday	"	Life of Christ	Biblical History	
Thursday	"	Church History	Liturgics	
Friday	9.30-10.20 Hygiene	Life of Christ	Study	
*Electives { The Greek Testament Ecclesiastical Music				

TABULAR VIEW—SENIOR YEAR

Day	9.00-10.15	10.30-11.20	11.30-12.20	
Monday	Study	Liturgics	Life and Epistles of St. Paul	
Tuesday	"	Biblical Literature	Old Testament Prophets	
Wednesday	"	Church History	Christian Evidences	
Thursday	"	Catholic Epistles	Life and Epistles of St. Paul	
Friday	9.30-10.20 Church History	Missions	Study	
*Electives { The Greek Testament Ecclesiastical Music Ecclesiastical Embroidery				



STUDENTS 1906-1907

Seniors

SARA EN LEONG CHUNG
EVA H. CRUMP
MABEL HOBART
FLORENCE M. HORNE
MARY L. KNEEVES
MAV KNEPPER

Juniors

FRANCES B. AFFLECK
A. REBECCA ARMSTRONG
MARY AVERY
JENNIE N. BARNETT
HARRIET BEDELL
HILDA M. EDEN
APAULINE A. GRIEBEL
AUGUSTA W. KAWCZYNSKI
ANNE W. LOVELL
MABEL W. NICHOLAS
ELIZABETH WINEGAR

WOMEN TRAINED IN THE SCHOOL BUT NOT SET APART TO THE DIACONATE

ANNA REBECCA ARMSTRONG	-	-	-	The Bronx, New York
HARRIET M. BEDELL,	-	-	-	Whirlwind, Oklahoma
SARA EN LEONG CHUNG,	-	-	-	Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands
GENEVIEVE DE TURBEVILLE,	-	-	-	San Francisco, California
HELEN CHASE FESSENDEN,	-	-	-	Boston, Mass.
ELLEN CLARK FULLERTON, M.D.,	-	-	-	Shanghai, China
ANNA HARGREAVES,	-	-	-	Philippine Islands
CAROLINE GERTRUDE HEYWOOD,	-	-	-	Tokyo, Japan

[Link to digitized yearbooks from the New York Training School for Deaconesses](#)

CHEYENNE and ARAPAHO TRIBES



(Western Oklahoma)

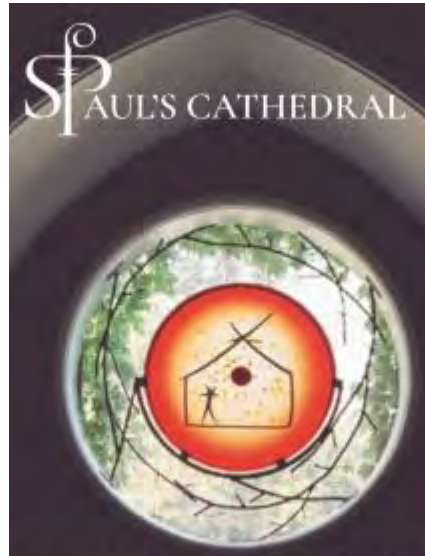
Okuh-Hatuh (David Pendleton Oakerhater) “Sun Dancer” “Making Medicine”

David Pendleton Oakerhater -

Okuh-Hatuh, was part of the first wave of the Diaconate in the Episcopal Church - Indigenous Deacons.

His name means “Sun Dancer” (he was reportedly the youngest in his tribe to complete the Sun Dance). He sometimes signed his name with a glyph of a dancer in a sun lodge.

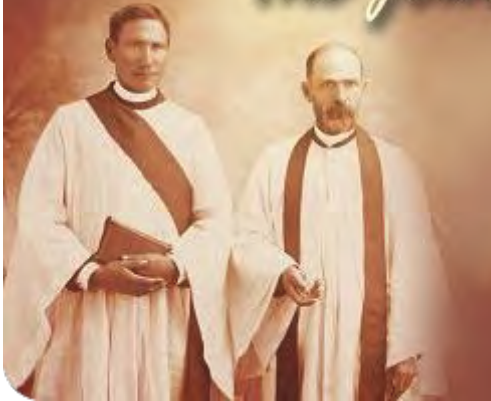
He also translated his name into English as “Making Medicine.”



Okuh-Hatuh self portrait

From Warrior to Saint

The Journey of David Pendleton Oakerhater



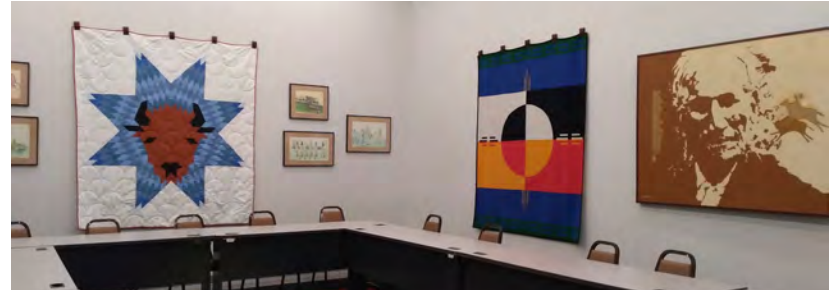
[Project of Oklahoma State University](#), supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

1st and 2nd Waves - Intersecting

Before she became a Deaconess, Bedell worked with and learned from Deacon [David Pendleton Oakerhater](#). Indigenous Deacons were the 1st wave of the Diaconate in the Episcopal Church, and Deaconesses were the 2nd wave.

These manifestations of what it means to be a deacon overlapped. Deacon Oakerhater's ministry and mentorship clearly influenced the shape of Bedell's own ministry.

She spent the rest of her career working with indigenous peoples: Cheyenne, Gwich'in, and Seminole tribes.



The Making Medicine Room at St. Paul's Cathedral, OKC



Deaconess Bedell with Seminole community.

Missionary teacher - Whirlwind Mission

Following her 2-yr training, Bedell was sent to Whirlwind Mission in Oklahoma, teaching at a day school for Cheyenne children and helping with the church.

She was given the name *Vicsehia* - "Bird Woman" because she sang, whistled, or hummed while working.

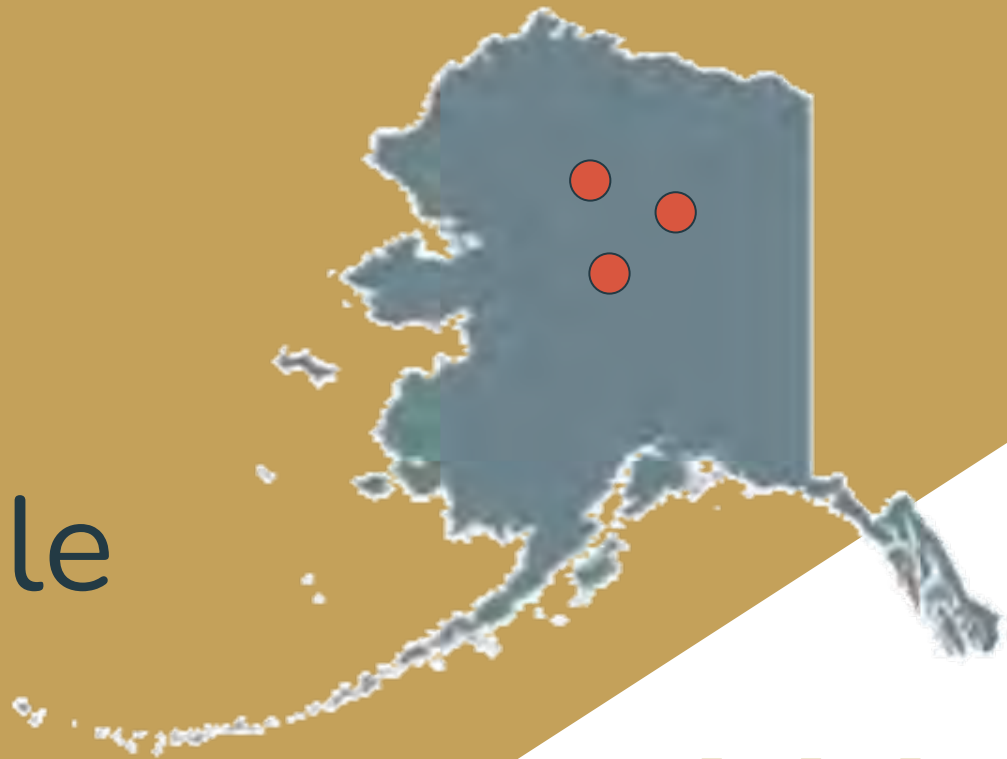
The Whirlwind Mission is still operating and is located near Watonga, OK.





Association for Episcopal Deacons Board visiting St. Paul's Cathedral in 2023, with cathedral deacon and nurse, MR Robertson.

Gwich'in Caribou People (Alaska)



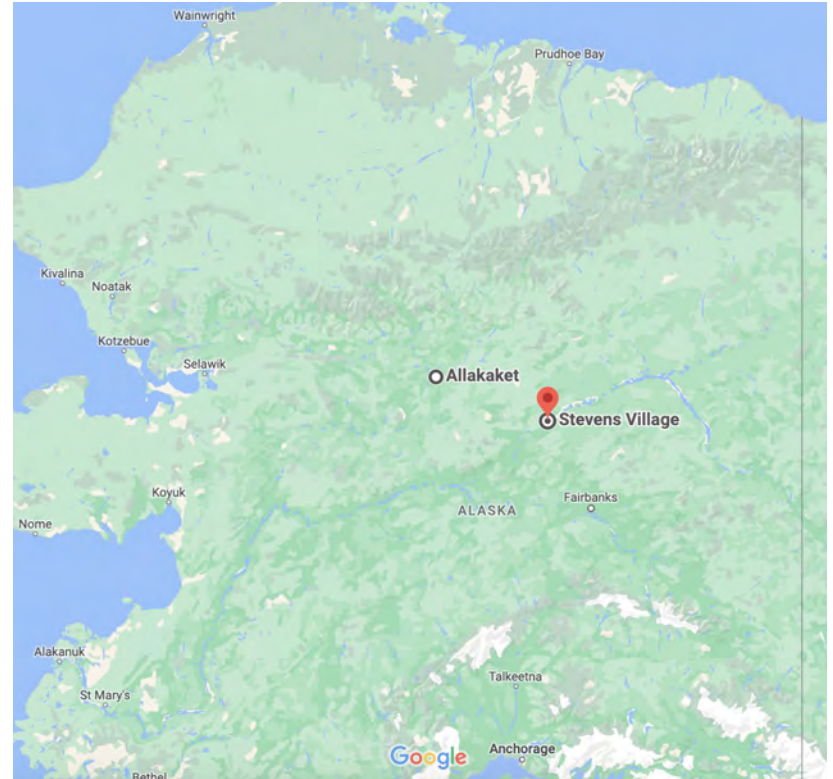
From the [Gwich'in Steering Committee](#) website:

“The Gwich'in are the northernmost Indian Nation living in fifteen small villages scattered across a vast area extending from northeast Alaska in the U.S. to the northern Yukon and Northwest Territories in Canada.

“The word “Gwich'in” means “people of the land,” and it refers to a people who have lived in the region since before the U.S. and Canada existed. Today, the Gwich'in homelands span both countries. Oral tradition indicates the Gwich'in have occupied this area since time immemorial, or, according to conventional belief, as long as 20,000 years.”

Bedell served in Stevens Village, Alaska and in Allakaket, at **St. John's in the Wilderness**, 40 miles south of the Arctic Circle.

Sometimes she traveled from there by dogsled to remote villages.



Allakaket and Stevens Village



Gwich'in children

Bedell worked with Gwich'in communities across northeastern Alaska.

In the later 1920s, she started a boarding school in Tanana; however, funding was drastically cut after the Depression, and the school closed.

Set apart as Deaconess, 1922

CANON 20

OF DEACONESSSES

AS AMENDED BY THE GENERAL CONVENTION, 1904

§ i. A woman of devout character and proved fitness, unmarried or widowed, may be appointed Deaconess by any Bishop of this Church. Such appointment shall be vacated by marriage.

§ ii. The duty of a Deaconess is to assist the Minister in the care of the poor and sick, the religious training of the young and others, and the work of moral reformation.

§ iii. No woman shall be appointed Deaconess until she

The Bishop.

O ETERNAL God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of man and woman; who didst anoint with the Spirit, Miriam and Deborah and Anna and Huldah; who didst not disdain that thine only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who, also, in the tabernacle of the testimony and in the temple, didst ordain women to be keepers of thy holy gates; Look mercifully, we beseech thee, upon *these* thy servants, about to be set apart to the office and work of Deaconess. Protect *them* in the way wherein *they* go, and grant that in singleness of purpose and with a willing mind *they* may worthily accomplish the task committed to *them*, to thy glory and to

A FORM FOR THE SETTING APART OF DEACONESSSES.

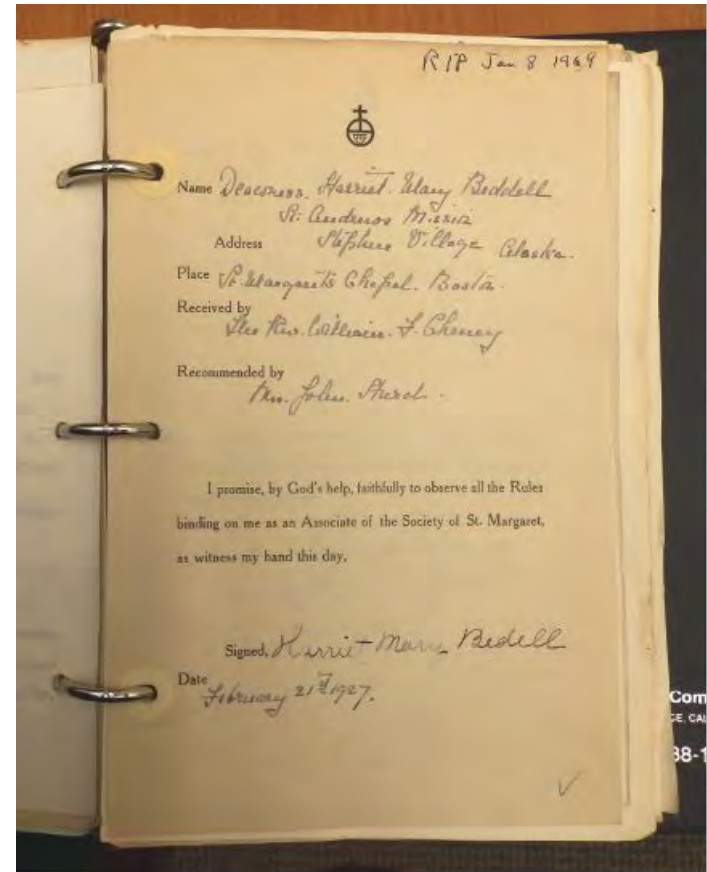
the praise of thy Christ, to whom with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, be glory and worship for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Society of St. Margaret

While serving in Alaska,
Deaconess Bedell became an
Associate of the Society of St.
Margaret in 1927, five years after
being set apart as a Deaconess.

The photo to the right includes
her signature

[Read more](#)



Miccosukee-Seminole tribe (Florida)





Deaconess Bedell with Mary Osceola Huff and Fanny Stuart



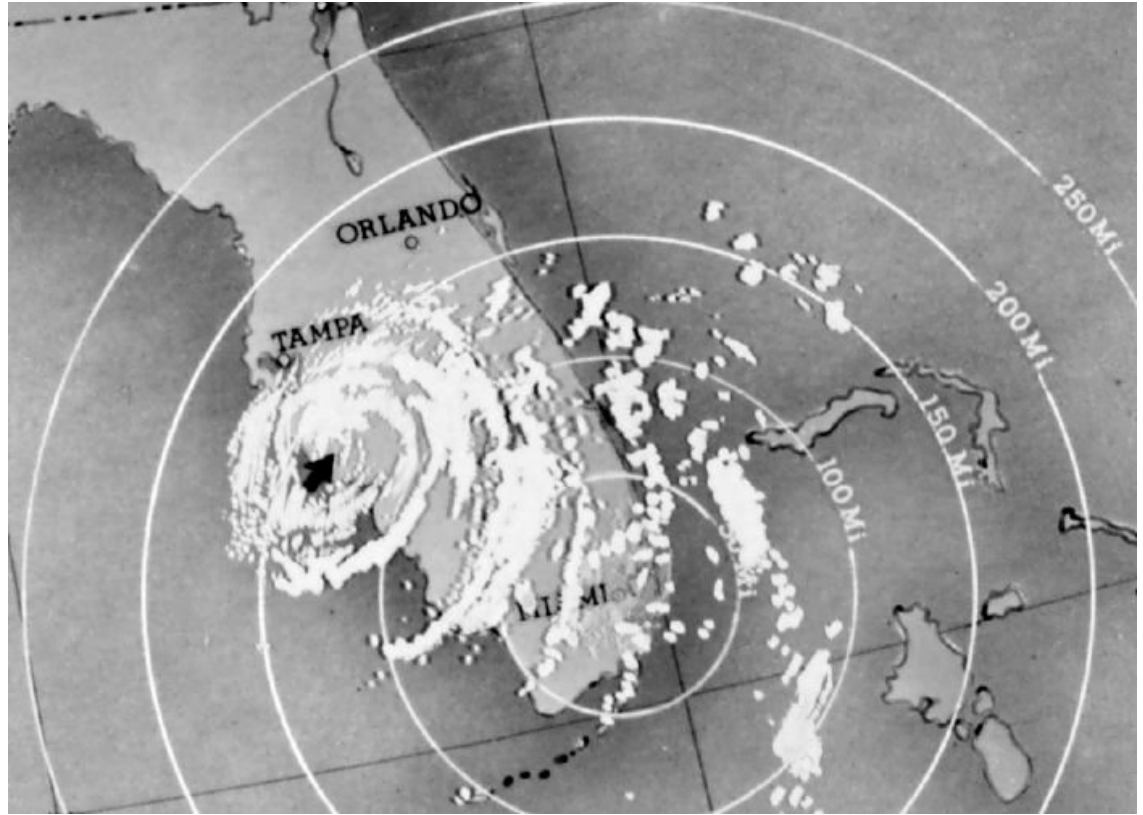
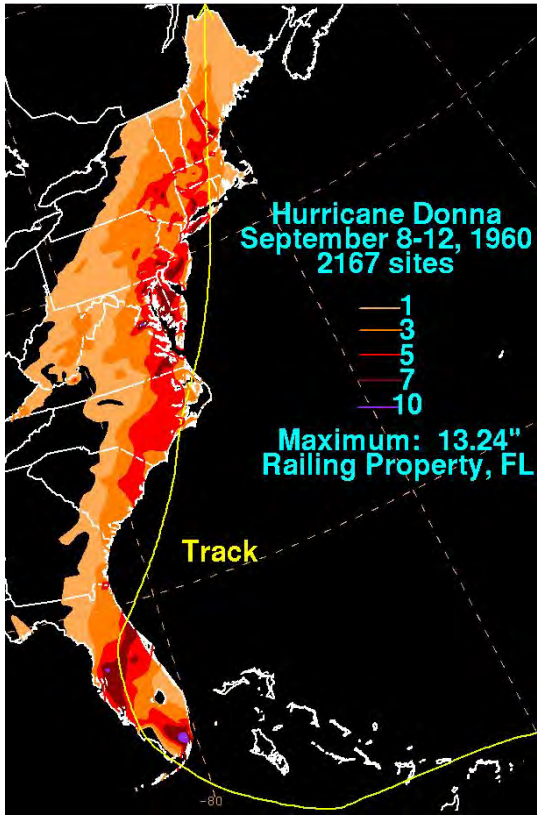
The Seminole community in the Everglades gave Bedell the name *Inkoshopie* - "Woman Who Prays."



Deaconess Bedell collaborated with the Seminole community to revive some traditional crafts and create a business to sell them, including dolls, baskets, models of dugout canoes, and other items.



Deaconess Bedell travelled 20,000 miles a year on average during her career in ministry.



Hurricane Donna (Category 4) hit Florida in 1960, and Bedell (age 85) had to evacuate. Her property was leveled, and so she finally retired from active ministry, though even in retirement, she continued to support work still going on.



TRIENNIAL -- ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI -- OCTOBER, 1964

Deaconess
Bedell died
January 8,
1969, just
shy of her
94th
birthday.

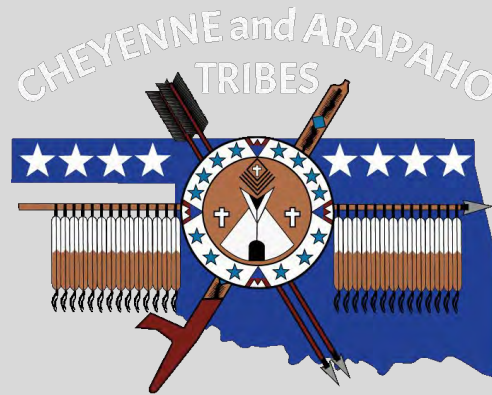
I'm not
sure, but I
think she
may be
seated on
the front
row of this
photo.

What might Deaconess Bedell have to say today

Become more knowledgeable and supportive of Native American communities in the present.

Below are links to websites for the tribes that Deaconess Bedell served with

- [Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes](#)
- [Gwich'in Tribal Council](#)
- [Seminole Tribe of Florida](#)



Gwich'in Tribal Council

*Gwich'in land, culture & economy
for a better future*

What might Deaconess Bedell have to say today

Communications is an incredibly important aspect of ministry

She was a regular contributor to “The Spirit of Missions” and took a lot of photos of the people and places she encountered in her work, to help others better understand the needs of others.

She’d likely have a blog, fb page, website, and/or podcast, helping people to understand each other’s cultures.

The Spirit of Missions

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY
REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

What might Deaconess Bedell have to say today

Commit to and connect with community to mutually grow in your faith.

In addition to becoming a Deaconess, she became an Associate of the [Society of St. Margaret](#). Other examples today:

- Daughters of the King
- Association for Episcopal Deacons
- Oblates of the Holy Cross Monastery
- St. Mark's and its many groups



Collect

Holy God, fill us with compassion and respect for all people,
and empower us for the work of ministry
whether near or far away;
that like your servant Harriet Bedell,
we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**