

# FAMILY CONNECTIONS



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## DIAKON STAFF MEMBERS HELP CHILDREN IN AFRICA

Recently, Rosa Watson and Geraldine Walker, staff members of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, traveled to Abiriw, a small village in Ghana, West Africa, as members of the Circle of Light Society. The Circle of Light Society's mission is to serve children in Africa and the United States by providing educational opportunities that will enhance their lives, including scholarships, apprenticeship programs, and, most recently, the opening of a Learning Center in Abiriw.

"Education can bring some hope to children's lives and help break generational cycles of poverty," says Watson. She further explains that the children of Africa love education and recognize it as a privilege. As a result,



Rosa Watson brings hope to children in Africa.



Geraldine Walker helps to change lives.

these students take every opportunity to learn and do not take education for granted. Since her return, according to Watson, the Learning Center is flourishing, so much so that it has been challenging to provide for all the children and teens wanting to participate.

Watson and Walker have been members of the "Circle of Light Society" for nearly six years. Watson shared that she feels, as an African woman herself, called to serve those connected to her heritage.

Watson says her service to this mission is a way to "uplift herself by serving the global community."

Another way that she lives this mission is by providing adoption and foster care services to local children and families through her work at Diakon, as well as through her and Walker's Harrisburg community-based organization, YaaKofiAma Nia House, Inc.

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<b>WAITING CHILDREN HAVE BEEN PLACED BY THE ADOPTION SERVICES OF DIAKON LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES... SO FAR!</b>	From the Executive Director.....2 Pennsylvania Finalizations.....4 Pennsylvania Placements.....6 Year in Statistics .....10 Post Permanency Services .....11



## SPECIAL ADOPTION MONTH EVENTS BUILD ADOPTION AWARENESS

BY: **LAUREN CONZAMAN, MSW, LSW**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

More than 100,000 children across the United States wait for a family to call their own. Although Diakon Adoption & Foster Care works every day to reduce that number, each November—National Adoption Month—prompts special efforts to build awareness of these children and their needs.

## YOUTHS GRAB SPOTLIGHT DURING FASHION SHOW

In Baltimore, Md., where approximately 800 children are available for adoption, Diakon hosted a fashion show and matching event, featuring 12 youths in need of permanent families. The children wore outfits that they had chosen, walked the red carpet to music they selected, and carried a prop, such as a soccer ball, that helped to identify their interests.

“It put the children in the spotlight in a very positive way,” says Ramona Hoyle, director of Diakon Adoption Services in Maryland. “People also had the opportunity to learn about adoption as a great way to build a family.”

This first-of-its-kind event, held at First English Lutheran Church in Baltimore, was the idea of Ebony Alderman, a Diakon child-specific recruitment specialist for the Wendy’s Wonderful Kids Program, funded by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Alderman works in concert with the Baltimore City Department of Social Services to find homes for identified waiting children, specifically the 12 who participated in the show.



*Fashion show participants.*



*Ebony Alderman and youth.*

“Three of the 12 children who walked the red carpet already have adoptive parents, identified through this program, who were proudly watching,” Hoyle says. “Ebony also has several very serious inquiries about the remaining nine children.”

As part of a state grant, Diakon has sponsored a variety of adoption-awareness events in many areas of Maryland, including a “Family Fun Day” at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Frederick and a dinner honoring adoptive families and professionals in Cecil County.

## ADOPTIVE FAMILIES EARN HONORS

As part of adoption month events, several south-central Pennsylvania adoption coalitions honored three adoptive families, among others, with “Friends of Adoption” awards. Of the three families honored, two serve as Diakon adoption resources—Jim and Brenda Wooding and Lynn Maines.

“Mr. and Ms. Wooding may appear to be just another family and would likely admit as much, however they are unique and special because they make ‘normal’ that which is beautiful and amazing,” says Craig Gehosky, director of the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care offices in York and Mechanicsburg.

“They are amazing because they have provided homes for 29 foster youths and adopted five children during their 11 years with Diakon. They also share their wisdom through their assistance with new resource-family training, during events for resource families, and, most importantly, through example.”

Also recognized was Lynn Maines, a single adoptive father. Marian Koviack, a Diakon case manager, shared that Maines, a research scientist, chose to adopt because he wanted to be more involved in a child’s life beyond his long-standing involvement in Big Brothers. “Lynn Maines expresses a deep sense of giving back to the community,” Koviack says. “His adoptive son entered his home with many learning challenges. Through Mr. Maines’ love, advocacy, and

desire to see his son excel, he is now achieving the same milestones as his peers.”

Gehosky says, “To have two of the three families recognized from

Diakon is impressive. Nominations came from throughout central Pennsylvania and different adoption coalitions.”



*Two Diakon adoption resource families, the Woodings and the Maines, received “Friends of Adoption” awards as part of adoption month.*

## SIBLINGS EARN RECOGNITION FOR DETERMINATION

In Lehigh County the adoption celebration continued when the county children and youth services office featured two youths adopted through Diakon during its annual adoption press conference. The brother and sister, Melinda, 17, and Tho’mas, 13, received a certificate from the county.

According to Linda Lofft, supervisor for Lehigh County Children and Youth Services, the siblings were recognized for their ability to look for the good in a process that, for them, was filled with disappointments.

“These children had been in care for quite a while and had a number of disappointments. Despite

all of that, they remained so hopeful,” Lofft says, adding that each served as a positive influence on the other.

“Since their adoption, they have made great strides. We thought they would be a good example of siblings who knew it was important to be together and who have been through thick and thin.”



*Melinda and Tho’mas with adoptive family.*



## DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE RECEIVED PROCLAMATION

In November, the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care office in York, Pa., along with other York County agencies, received a proclamation from York City Mayor John S. Brenner and the York County Commissioners in recognition of National Adoption Month.



Mayor John S. Brenner proclaims November as National Adoption Month. Also pictured are Cheryl Drake, Shirley Cherry, and Denise Roe of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

## DIAKON POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP CELEBRATES THE HOLIDAYS

Almost 40 parents and children came together to celebrate Christmas at the Diakon post-adoption support group holiday party in December. The festivities took place at Atonement Lutheran Church in Wyomissing. Children enjoyed fun arts and crafts, face painting, and a surprise visit from Santa, while parents enjoyed interacting with other group members and watching their children participate in all the fun.

Diakon's post-adoption support group meets on the second Tuesday of every month from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at Atonement Lutheran Church in Wyomissing. Childcare is available. Call Christine Smith Hoh at (610) 682-1510 for information on how to become a member of the support group.

## IN NEED OF SUPPORT?

If you live in Pennsylvania and are in need of post-adoption/permanency support, please take advantage of this free service. As long as you live within the state and have adopted a child or children, you are eligible to receive assistance with case management, respite, and support group services free of charge. For more information please call 1-877-DIAKON-7 or visit [www.diakon.org](http://www.diakon.org) or [www.diakon-swan.org](http://www.diakon-swan.org).

### Pennsylvania FINALIZATIONS

**OCTOBER 3, 2007**

Jose  
Gerardo & Stephanie  
Bernville, Pa.

**OCTOBER 25, 2007**

Andrea  
Alfreda & Nydia  
Mohrsville, Pa.

**OCTOBER 10, 2007**

Matthew  
Barry & Cynthia  
Fleetwood, Pa.

**NOVEMBER 13, 2007**

Skye and Kris  
Randy & Patrick  
Kunkletown, Pa.

**OCTOBER 10, 2007**

Terry  
John & Michelle  
Harrisburg, Pa.

**DECEMBER 5, 2007**

John  
Bernie & Karen  
York, Pa.

**OCTOBER 17, 2007**

Orrin  
Steve & Alicia  
Mohrsville, Pa.

**DECEMBER 7, 2007**

Daniel  
Todd & Penny  
Zionsville, Pa.

**OCTOBER 24, 2007**

Isaiah  
Mike & Karen  
Bernville, Pa.

**DECEMBER 11, 2007**

Chad  
Wayne & Steve  
Kutztown, Pa.

**OCTOBER 24, 2007**

Angel and Romeo  
Ismael & Monserrate  
Reading, Pa.

**DECEMBER 11, 2007**

Demares  
Ramon & India  
Reading, Pa.

**DECEMBER 27, 2007**

Thomalika  
William & Myra  
Reading, Pa.

## COUPLE OPENS HEARTS TO ADOPTION OVER AND OVER AGAIN

As soon as you come through the front door of Pam and Bill Tynan's home, you're aware of the presence of kids. The noise, laughter, and occasional shriek of children's play, the scattering of toys, are indications of a household bustling with the busyness of young lives.

The Tynans of Freemansburg, Pa., have the kind of unique family that can come together only through adoption. To create their special family, the Tynans opened their hearts and home not just once, but again and again—five times, in fact.

Their journey began about a dozen years ago. Pam had been married previously and had two children, but when she and Bill wed, they wanted a family together. They turned to Diakon.

Ethan was the first to arrive, followed by Andrew and then Matthew. Johanna joined the family about three years ago, with the baby, Billy, making it five. Matthew and Billy are Ethan's brothers. Various circumstances affected the birth families and placed the children in a

position to be adopted. All came to the family as newborns.

"At first, I felt two was enough. Then Matthew came along and we wanted to keep the siblings together. So we grew a little more from there," Pam says. "The word adoption is used here," she adds. "We're open about it. We say, 'Your mother wasn't able to take care of you' and that's it."

Managing the busy family is challenging at times, Bill notes. "There's always somewhere to go between school and sports activities and dance classes for Johanna, and travel can be chaotic. Some people think we're crazy," he laughs.

Pam enjoys sharing their story and is willing to speak to anyone considering adoption. After having gone through the process five times, she says there's nothing she hasn't worried or wondered about, including what is considered to be a very common concern. "I asked myself," she says. "Am I going to be able to love that baby like my own?" The answer is yes."

Bill and Pam Tynan welcomed their children through a range of Diakon programs that reach out to children in need—Diakon Adoption & Foster Care's special-needs adoption and foster-to-adopt programs, and Diakon Pregnancy Services.

- Children with special needs are those who are five years of age or older; sibling groups; those with emotional, social, or physical challenges or a genetic predisposition to them; those of minority heritage; or those within the child welfare system.
- Foster-to-adopt placements typically involve children who have been living with a foster family that intends to adopt them when possible.
- Diakon Pregnancy Services helps a birth mother arrange for placement of her infant with an adoptive family she thinks is best suited to parent the child.

## THE DAVE THOMAS FOUNDATION FOR ADOPTION RENEWS DIAKON GRANTS

Wendy's Wonderful Kids, a signature program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption renewed two \$65,000 grants going to Diakon to help fulfill our mission of locating loving homes for adoptive children in foster care. These grants will allow Diakon to provide free child specific recruitment to youth waiting for permanent families in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

# PLACEMENTS

## OCTOBER 1, 2007

Isaiyah, 7, and Destiny, 7, joined Isaac, James, Valez, and Karen of Bethlehem, Pa.

## OCTOBER 1, 2007

Ian, 3, joined David and Karen of Birdsboro, Pa.

## OCTOBER 12, 2007

Benjamin, one month old, joined Andrew and Lisa of Allentown, Pa.

## OCTOBER 13, 2007

Chymyra, 6, joined Steven and Andrea of Mohrsville, Pa.

## NOVEMBER 1, 2007

Zoe, 3, joined Leon and Denise of Allentown, Pa.

## NOVEMBER 1, 2007

Oscar, six months old, joined Darren and Theresa of Northampton, Pa.

## NOVEMBER 16, 2007

Makayla and Tommy joined Stewart and Heather of New Cumberland, Pa.

## DECEMBER 1, 2007

Tammy, 3, and Claire, 8, joined Ed and Marcie of New Tripoli, Pa.

## DECEMBER 22, 2007

Beyonce, 6, joined Barry and Kelly of Allentown, Pa.



Six-month-old Orrin was adopted on Oct. 17 by Steven and Alicia.



Andrea was adopted on Oct. 24.



Brad and Michelle adopted Jayla, 3 years old, on Jan. 7. Jayla comes from Lebanon County.



Staff from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, along with York County Children and Youth, Children's Home of York, and the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network rode in the 2007 Halloween Parade in York, Pa. Their float was entered by the York Area Adoption Coalition to promote the adoption of children with special needs.

## FIFTH ANNUAL ADOPTION NIGHT AT WILLIAMS GROVE SPEEDWAY SCHEDULED

In celebration of the fifth running of Adoption Night at Williams Grove Speedway, track promoters have dedicated the track's racing schedule of Aug. 1, 2008, entirely to the cause of adoption, naming it the "Diakon Adoption & Foster Care Adoption Night Race."

For the last four years, Adoption Night has coincided with the Mitch Smith Memorial Race during Speed Week at Williams Grove. Diakon staff is thrilled to have an evening's racing devoted to finding homes for children.

"Williams Grove Speedway has always been so generous to youths searching for families by allowing us to be part of Speed Week. We were very moved when we learned that our cause was receiving its own race event," says Elisa Esh, director of resource family recruitment for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care. "We are grateful to the Mitch Smith family, who has kindly shared the memorial race with us to promote adoption awareness and are thrilled that the event continues to grow."

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care Adoption Night races will feature races from both 410 and 358 division sprint cars. To promote adoption, these sprint cars will display a temporary vinyl covering on each car's top wing boards featuring individual photos of children seeking adoption. Last year, 63 children were featured on the sprint cars. Because this the entire schedule of evening racing is this year devoted to adoption, the potential exists to feature more than 80 children on the cars in both categories. Featured youths will attend the race and meet drivers and teams of the car on which their respective photos are featured.

"We are thrilled that the racing community has embraced Pennsylvania's children who are searching for something so basic as a family," says Esh. "We have already begun receiving sponsorships and are hopeful that our previous race supporters will do so again, since having our own race means it will be double the size."

Corresponding with the Adoption Night races, an adoption fair will be held at the pit entrance parking area the afternoon of the event. The fair will provide information about children available for adoption and the adoption process.

"Our goal is to increase awareness of the need for adoptive and foster families for children," explains Esh. "The 2007 race provided us with the opportunity to educate more than 10,000 racing fans about adoption and the wonderful children searching for homes. The event was a huge success and three children were matched with families that attended the race. One of those families will have their adoptive child placed in their home before Christmas."

Teams or drivers interested in participating in the 2008 race, and those willing to serve as sponsors, can contact Elisa Esh at 800-723-7038 or via e-mail at [eshe@diakon.org](mailto:eshe@diakon.org).

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR



## DINING WITH DIAKON, THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2008

Don't miss this one-of-a-kind tasting and networking experience featuring leaders from the central Pennsylvania region who serve as guest chefs. Sample their favorite recipes, place your bid on exciting silent auction items, and connect with old friends from around the area.

Proceeds from this event will benefit the Diakon Wilderness Center.





## REMEMBERING AND HOPING

BY: RAMONA HOYLE, DIAKON ADOPTION SERVICES, MARYLAND OFFICE

This week we received a call from an adoptive mother who said she had some sad news to share. This parent had adopted a sibling group more than 10 years ago through Diakon and her children are now teenagers and young adults. Her oldest daughter had been a troubled teen with many challenges along the way. There had been periods of estrangement that were very difficult, yet, at the time of this crisis, the

mother said, her daughter was terminally ill and in the hospital. The circumstances were complicated, but she had been there for her daughter.

I offered to go and visit, and before I could get there the 21 year old daughter had quietly passed away, with her mother holding her hand. When I was speaking to a colleague about that later, she offered this thought: “While the way this young person’s life story played out isn’t

what we would have liked under any circumstances, she did not die alone. Her mom was there with her.” Just think how many troubled children who age out of foster care without permanency may face their final moments alone.

I know that we all hope for the best for our children, and sometimes the reality of our lives may not live up to the dream. But permanency and family is something that is always a gift, and that is worth remembering.

## HOLIDAY SPIRIT ALIVE IN THE TOPTON REGION

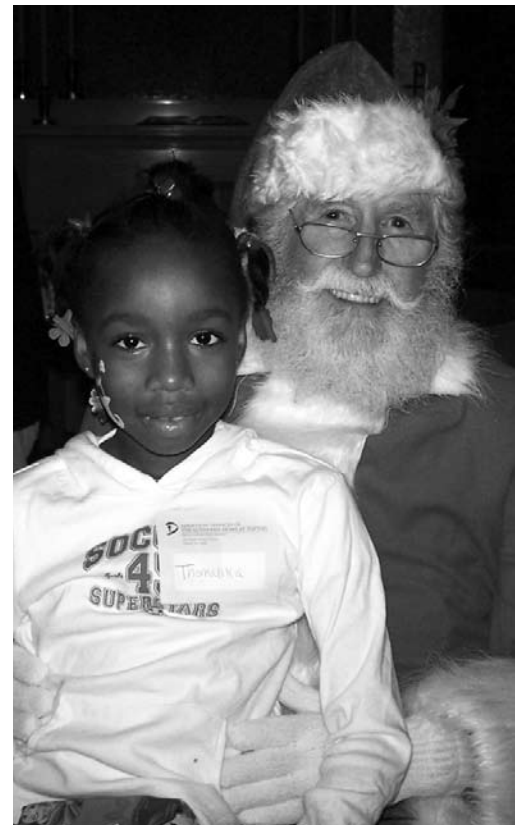
Christmas is a busy and special time at Diakon Adoption & Foster Care’s Topton office as hundreds of gifts arrive for the children. Week after week, from early December until Christmas, scheduled deliveries of wrapped gifts arrive from the community. Locally, several corporations and Lutheran congregations, the Lutheran missions districts, Luther Crest – a Diakon Senior Living Community in Allentown, Pa., and a local pre-school opened their hearts to provide children in the program with a holiday to remember.

This year, O’Brien’s Moving and Storage Company donated a truck and a worker’s time to pick up and deliver some of the donated gifts. Once a delivery of gifts arrives, a chain of staff forms from the truck to

the office, moving the gifts in, one by one. After the gifts are sorted, staff transports them to the children’s foster home to be put under the tree for Christmas morning.

The Christmas celebration continues for children and families with a holiday party at Muhlenberg College in Allentown. Students and staff of the college organize and sponsor the event, which features activities for the children, dinner, and a special visit from Santa and his elves. More than 100 families and children shared in the fun event this year.

Special thanks to Muhlenberg College for sharing the holiday spirit with Diakon’s families, and to everyone who donated toys and clothes to brighten Christmas morning for the children.



*Thomalika with Santa.*



# AS PART OF ADOPTION MONTH, DIAKON ADOPTION SERVICES, MARYLAND OFFICE, HELD A FAMILY FUN DAY!



*Serious golfer tries for hole in one.*



*Cherron Holmes, support group coordinator, enjoys carnival.*



*Teon plays golf.*



*Shooting hoops for prizes.*



*Adoptive families enjoy lunch together.*



*Mike, Stacey, and Matthew trying ringing the bell!*

## YEAR IN STATISTICS

2007 was a successful year for adoption, foster care and pregnancy services. We were able to serve more families and youth than ever before. Considering significant Federal, State and local funding cuts and limited child welfare dollars available to the youth and families we serve, the programs were able to increase the number of placements, adoptions and total SWAN units of service completed in 2007.

### Comparing 2006 to 2007...

- In 2007 the programs received more than 400 referrals for children to be placed on a foster care or foster to adopt basis, actually placing 206 children into foster care, compared to 205 in 2006.
- There were a total of 72 adoption finalizations in 2007, compared to 42 in 2006.
- Diakon Adoption & Foster Care placed 61 children into adoptive homes in 2007 and 58 in 2006.
- The four office sites completed a total of 175 family profiles and profile updates in 2007 and 118 in 2006.
- A total of 113 child profiles were completed in 2007, compared to 105 in 2006.
- The number of child preparation (from 17 to 6 units) and child specific recruitment units (from 89 to 74 units) of service reduced a bit compared to 2006, but not a significant decrease.
- The program received more than 500 calls from families interested in our programs and the possibility of becoming licensed as a resource family.
- Diakon Pregnancy Services worked with 32 birth families in 2007 and 37 in 2006.



*Cliff and Lisa adopted Kavon and Kennon from Lehigh County.*



*Daniel, pictured with parents, Penny and Todd, and worker, Chelsea Gerould.*



*Chad was adopted by Steve and Wayne, and joins brother, Jacob.*



*Francisco and Diane adopted Hailey from York County.*



## 20TH ANNIVERSARY DIAKON BENEFACTORS DINNER, THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2008 “AN EVENING WITH JOHN TESH”

John Tesh will perform live at the 20th Anniversary Diakon Benefactors Dinner, Thursday, May 15, at the Sovereign Performing Arts Center, Reading, Pa. A new dining-station celebration will honor the event's founders, Col. Harry Yoder and Bill Deibert, at 5:30 p.m., followed by the

Tesh performance in the theater at 7:15 p.m. All proceeds benefit Diakon Adoption & Foster Care and the charitable care provided to residents of The Lutheran Home at Topton.

For more information on the dinner and the show (\$200) or just the show (\$55), readers may call Dawna Trump



toll-free at: 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, ext. 50464, or visit [www.diakon.org/benefactors](http://www.diakon.org/benefactors). Save by purchasing your tickets from Jan. 28 through Feb. 28, before Ticketmaster sales begin on March 1.

## THE JOURNEY THROUGH POST PERMANENCY SERVICES FAQ.....

Approximately 20,000 families provide permanency to children in Pennsylvania.

**Q: Who is eligible for post permanency services?**

**A: All Pennsylvania families who are:**

- permanent or subsidized legal custodians
- fit and willing relatives or adoptive families

**Q: Why are these services necessary?**

**A: Post permanency services are ongoing prevention services that enhance permanency and support in families.**

**Q: How do I access post permanency services?**

**A: Call the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network at 1-800-585-SWAN.**

**Q: How long before services begin?**

**A: Onset of services varies from family to family.**

**Q: What is the cost?**

**A: The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare provides funding for post permanency services.**

### Step by Step...

#### Step One:

##### Call for help

Call the SWAN Helpline at 1-800-585-SWAN. Helpline staff will explain the services, assist the family in choosing an agency to complete an assessment and submit the referral.

#### Step Two:

##### The Assessment Process

All families seeking post permanency services must have an assessment. An assessor will visit the home and talk with the entire family to build on family strengths. He or she will then recommend the best possible services.

#### Step Three:

##### Referral for Services

These services are available to Pennsylvania families.

##### Case Advocacy Service

Case advocacy is designed to provide support for families through a case advocate who communicates with the family by providing ongoing support. The advocate also assists the family by attending meetings or helping to access services in the community.

##### Respite Service

Respite services support the family by developing resources that help alleviate the pressures of parenting special needs children. For example, a respite provider can provide a safe environment for the child while the family takes a break by going out for the night or enjoying a weekend away. Respite can occur in the family's own home or outside the home. This is a decision families can make with the respite provider.

##### Support Group Service

The support group service is designed to ensure that families are supported by building relationships with other families, forming a community of support and mentoring and providing information and educational materials.

Information provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN).



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Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries offers a range of specialized programs for children, individuals, families, and senior adults.

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Visit our website at [www.diakon.org](http://www.diakon.org)

## WE'RE THANKFUL FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

*Your financial support will help to bring together more families through Adoption and Foster Care.*

Through your support, you can help Diakon Adoption & Foster Care to touch the lives of children and youths in need. From donating books for our resource libraries to offering financial assistance to help subsidize adoption fees or providing items for foster children, your support is vital. Over the years, generous donations have helped our mission to become a reality in so many young lives.

You, too, can make a difference! Simply use the envelope in this issue of *Family Connections* or log onto our Web site's convenient and secure donation form to make your gift.

*For further information on how you can support Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, please call our Office of Advancement at 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 2, extension 21219. Thank you!*



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