

Diaconal Work in Neuendettelsau through the Ages: From the Nineteenth-Century Deaconess Institution to the Diaconal Enterprise of the Twenty-First Century

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Introduction

Neuendettelsau has been involved in diaconal work for over 170 years, dating back to Pastor Wilhelm Loehe. Over the years, the small village in west-central Franconia has grown from its modest beginnings into the largest diaconal organization in southern Germany, with more than 10,000 employees and revenue around €650 million. This growth has been possible because those responsible have always been attuned to the needs of people on the one hand and to the requirements and challenges of society on the other. They have repeatedly changed and adapted the services offered as well as the structures and general conditions for diaconal work. In so doing, it has been important to define and to show Neuendettelsau's distinctive profile, and in turn to become a source of inspiration for the church, diakonia, and society as a whole. Thus, one can form a link from the original Diakonissenanstalt Neuendettelsau (Deaconess Institution) to the Evangelical Lutheran Diakoniewerk Neuendettelsau (lit., Diakonia Works), then to Diakoneo, the company that emerged in 2019 from the merger of the Evangelical Lutheran Diakoniewerk Neuendettelsau with the Evangelical Diakoniewerk Schwäbisch Hall. The latter has a history very similar to that of the Diakoniewerk Neuendettelsau. What follows aims to explain the background and changes that have taken place in Diakoneo from the time of Wilhelm Loehe to the current social situation and to highlight the aspects that are important in the twenty-first century for the continued success of diaconal work in Neuendettelsau and beyond.

Origin and development in the nineteenth century: The time of the Deaconess Institution

In 1854, Pastor Loehe opened the first Bavarian deaconess institution in Neuendettelsau. He was responding to the social challenges of the mid-nineteenth century, which were influenced in particular by the industrial revolution. Industrialization had created a wage-dependent workforce that lived in poverty due to a lack of social

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security. This led to profound social change and political dynamics.

Responsible people, among them many church leaders, were concerned as to how they could counter the social problems of the times. To quote Wilhelm Loehe from a speech at Nuremberg in 1850: "Poverty and helplessness are spreading horribly—pauperism, proletariat, communism, and all the names with which the nineteenth century classifies its misery haunt every soul."¹ Diaconal work in Germany was influenced by the approaches of Theodor Fliedner, who in 1836 established the first deaconess institution in Kaiserswerth, and Johann Hinrich Wichern, who undertook many social initiatives and in a speech at the 1848

1. Wilhelm Loehe, "Innere Mission im allgemeinen," in *Fünf Festreden* (Nürnberg: Raw'sche Buchhandlung, 1850), 10; also, in Wilhelm Loehe, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Klaus Ganzert (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1962), 180.

Wittenberg church congress coined the term “inner mission” for the social work of the church and emphasized its necessity. Wilhelm Loehe took up the ideas of Fliedner and Wichern and adapted them according to his concept of ministry and church.²

The founding of the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution was a process that took several years. It began in 1850 with Loehe’s establishment of the Gesellschaft für innere Mission im Sinne der lutherischen Kirche (Society for Inner Mission in the Spirit of the Lutheran Church).³ The supporting organization for the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution originated from this society, with the Dean of Windsbach, Friedrich Bachmann, as its chairman. From the very beginning, the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution was conceived as an educational institution. The first paragraph of the governing statutes states this very clearly: “The aim of the Deaconess Institution at Neuendettelsau is that of an educational institution for young women in service of the young and the infirm.”⁴ This educational aspect was very close to Loehe’s heart, and in that he took a new, innovative path. He also provided training to young women who did not wish to pursue the vocational goal of deaconess but wanted to acquire further education. Thus, the deaconess house (*Diakonissenhaus*) designed and implemented the vocational training accordingly.

Loehe’s practical approach to diaconal work differed from the practice common in the mid-nineteenth century, which involved founding a mother house along the lines of Theodor Fliedner. Loehe’s original intention was to train young women and deaconesses in Neuendettelsau who would then return to their congregations after completing their training—to their own or other families—to engage in diaconal work.

For this purpose, Loehe had founded the Lutherische Verein für weibliche Diakonie (Lutheran Association for Female Diaconia) on February 27, 1854.

This association led to the establishment of further branches which were to set up their own diaconal institutions. Initially such branches were formed in towns near Neuendettelsau: Nuremberg, Fürth, Altdorf, Gunzenhausen, Hersbruck and Wendelstein, and they took up different fields of work. This, however, didn’t develop as hoped. These activities could not be expanded, nor were further organizations founded.⁵

This prompted Loehe to change his concept. From then on, he followed the path of an “institutionalized diaconia.” Loehe further expanded the areas of work that already existed in the mother-house, working with people with disabilities, the elderly, and the sick. The school and vocational training system was also expanded. A visible sign of this was the extensive building activity that Loehe began in 1858. Homes for people with disabilities, hospitals, and

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social institutions were built in Neuendettelsau; a “colony” of diaconal institutions developed in the small Franconian village.

At the same time, Loehe supported the social, diaconal work in towns and villages by sending deaconesses there although no longer with the task of founding their own institutions. Instead, the deaconesses worked in already existing parish or municipal institutions. Loehe was also active internationally, as shown by the sending of deaconesses to North America, the Baltic states, Bessarabia, and Nice in southern France. In this way, a wide range of diaconal work with its own profile gradually developed in Neuendettelsau, and consequently the educational aspect was to become a permanent focus of the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution over the years.⁶

Development in the twentieth century: From Deaconess Institution to *Diakoniewerk*

In the decades that followed, those responsible for diaconal work in Neuendettelsau continued to react to social developments and adapted the concept of diaconal work to these challenges. The period before the twentieth century was characterized by “rapid expansion and forced modernization.” There were “tendencies toward specialization and differentiation of fields of work, toward the vocationalization and professionalization of nurses and teachers, and toward the medicalization and pedagogization of work.”⁷

Steady growth in the first half of the twentieth century also resulted in the need for an increasing number of employees in diaconal work in addition to the deaconesses. After a peak in the 1930s, there was a decline in the number of deaconesses with fewer entering the sisterhood. Apart from the declining number of new deaconesses, there was a growing number of elderly sisters. At the same time, the need for diaconal work increased, and the professionalization and expansion of the social and health care system in the welfare state after World War II stepped up the pressure to recruit additional personnel for the Deaconess Institution. In

2. Harald Jenner, *Von Neuendettelsau in alle Welt: Entwicklung und Bedeutung der Diakonissenanstalt Neuendettelsau/Diaconie Neuendettelsau 1854-1891/1900*. (Neuendettelsau: Diakonie Neuendettelsau, 2004), 52.

3. Jenner, *Von Neuendettelsau in alle Welt*, 69ff.

4. *Erster Bericht über den Bestand der Diakonissenanstalt zu Neuendettelsau 1854/1855* (Nördlingen: Beck, 1855), 18.

5. Jenner, *Von Neuendettelsau in alle Welt*, 259ff.

6. Cf. Jenner, *Von Neuendettelsau in alle Welt*, 254ff.

7. Hans-Walter Schmuß and Ulrike Winkler, *Auf dem Weg ins 20. Jahrhundert: Die Diakonissenanstalt Neuendettelsau unter den Rektoren Hermann Bezzel (1891-1909) und Wilhelm Eichhorn (1909-1918)* (Neuendettelsau: Diakonie Neuendettelsau, 2009), 231.

addition to the deaconess community (*Diakonissengemeinde*) and the brotherhood (*Brüderschaft*), which had also been formed in the nineteenth century, the auxiliary sisterhood (*Hilfsschwesternschaft*; later, associated sisterhood [*Verbandschwesternschaft*]) came into being in the 1920s. It became the third diaconal community under the umbrella of the Deaconess Institution. In addition, more and more employees who were not members of a diaconal community joined the organization. Hired to serve the community, this group of employees increased continuously. The recruitment of young people for diaconal work was further intensified, for example, by the introduction of the “Diaconal Year” in 1954, an initiative that led to the establishment of the “Voluntary Social Welfare Year” at the federal level. Furthermore, more schools for training in social professions were set up, for example, the College for the Care of the Elderly (*Fachschule für Altenpflege*) in Neuendettelsau, founded in 1961 as the first school for geriatric nursing in Bavaria, and the College for the Care of the Disabled (*Fachschule für Heilerziehungspflege*) in existence since 1974.

In 1966, for the first time there were more hired employees at the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution than those belonging to a diaconal community. As a result, there was a need for the basic conditions for diaconal work to be laid down: working hours and remuneration were regulated; and vacation and time-off regulations were introduced.⁸

In the 1970s, the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution developed further into the Evangelical Lutheran Diakoniewerk Neuendettelsau. It took a new name with a new constitution, which came into effect May 1, 1974. The governing statutes provided for new committees and structures in which both members of the communities and the hired employees participated. The “mother” society, which had existed since the beginnings of the Association for Female Diakonia in Bavaria, became the board of trustees.

Since it could not be assumed that all employees—most all of whom were members of a Christian church—had a basic Christian orientation, various courses and seminars were provided from the 1980s onward. This gave them the opportunity for further diaconal education and training to become a deaconess or deacon. It also allowed employees to engage more intensively with the biblical-theological roots of diaconal work and the diaconal profile and thus deepen their understanding of diaconal work. At the end of the twentieth century, the mission statement described the Diakoniewerk as a Christian service community with various members working together to provide professional diaconal services.

Diakoneo at the beginning of the twenty-first century: From Diakoniewerk to diaconal enterprise

Concerning the contemporary development of a diaconal enterprise or company (*diakonisches Unternehmen*), I have written previously in this way:

If one compares the general conditions in the social and health care sector in Germany in the twenty-first century

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with those at the end of the twentieth century, it is possible to identify numerous fundamental changes. Since the mid-1990s, a paradigm shift has taken place, as it were. Many authors describe this change with the catchphrase “economization of the social institutions.” Since the turn of the millennium, diaconal organizations have faced a host of challenges. These include, for example, increasing regulation in the health and social care market at national and European level, increased competition with ever tighter frameworks, rising expectations for quality on the part of our clients and supervisory authorities, and the generally enormous speed of change in society.

In response to these and other changes, it is increasingly necessary to manage diaconal enterprises in a multi-rational way. For the diaconal work in Neuendettelsau, this meant taking further steps consistent with development from a diaconal organization to a diaconal enterprise. The first steps on this path were already taken in the 1990s, for example, with the implementation of an integrated management system, strategic planning, and the Balanced Scorecard for corporate management. These developments have been rigorously strengthened with the change of rector in 2015, which resulted in the replacement of several positions on the board of directors. The process of change begun at that time envisioned further steps toward a clearer orientation as a diaconal enterprise. This included, for example, the introduction of a modern organizational and management structure, a differentiated corporate management system, and a clear, future-oriented structure for the distribution of responsibilities and tasks, as well as work on a modern, value- and meaning-oriented management culture, on internal and external corporate communications, and on clearly profiled positioning of the company in the social and healthcare market.”⁹

9. Mathias Hartmann, “Strukturen der Zusammenarbeit von Diakonischen Gemeinschaften und Diakonischen Unternehmen im 21. Jahrhundert,” in *Diakonische Unternehmen und Diakonische Gemeinschaften—Partner für gelingende Diakonie*, ed. Heidi Albrecht, Frieder Grau, and Daniela Krause-Wack (Leipzig: Evangelische Ver-

8. Schmuhl and Winkler, *Auf dem Weg*, 377ff.

In recent years, two circumstances have arisen that acted as a catalyst for this undertaking. After almost a year of preparation, the merger of Evangelical Lutheran Diakoniewerk Neuendettelsau with Diakoniewerk Schwäbisch Hall took place in 2019. These two economically stable diaconal organizations, both shaped by the Kaiserswerth deaconess tradition, decided to tackle the future challenges of social and health care together and to form the Diakoneo corporate group from the previously independent, medium-sized companies. And so, on July 1, 2019, the largest diaconal company in southern Germany was created, with just over 10,000 employees and around €650 million (around \$680 million) in revenue.

In addition to the new company name, a new brand was established, new bylaws adopted, and a new organizational structure implemented. The central services (finance, human resources and legal, corporate controlling, construction and real estate, corporate communications, information technology, etc.) of the two previous companies were merged in a one-and-a-half-year integration process, and in 2021 the new Central Corporate Development Service was created. This has already given significant impetus to the development of Diakoneo with the establishment of a company-wide cycle for strategy and the further development of values-oriented management.¹⁰

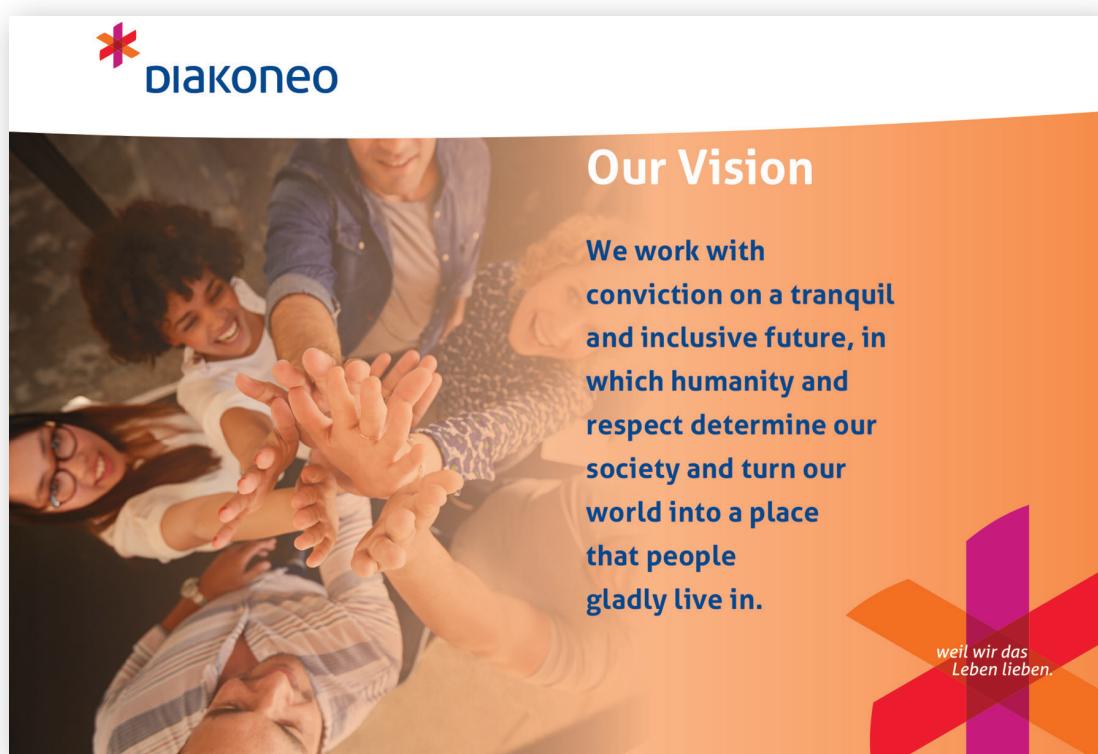
The second circumstance that has acted as a catalyst for Diakoneo's development into a diaconal company was and is the

lagsanstalt, 2019), 276ff. See also Beate Hofmann, M. Büscher, eds., *Diakonische Unternehmen multirational führen: Grundlagen—Kontroversen—Potentiale* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017).

10. Mathias Hartmann, *Handbuch Führungsethik*, part 2: *Leadership im Fusionsprozess* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2021), 16ff.

Diakoneo's Executive Board has decided to view this diversity not as a problem, but as an opportunity to consciously promote the diversity of employees in terms of cultural and religious background, gender and sexual orientation, and to integrate this diversity into the reality of the company.

global Coronavirus pandemic. Since March 2020, it has shaped the company's day-to-day operations and intensified the social challenges that existed even before the pandemic, but have been enormously exacerbated by it: the shortage of skilled workers (especially in the nursing professions), the underfunding of long-term care insurance, the inadequate structure and financing of the healthcare system, the loss of relevance of the major Christian churches, and increasing multiculturalism and diversity of society. As a result, Diakoneo is having to rethink many processes and strategic priorities. This applies in particular to the business areas of health and services for people, but also to the overall orientation of the company. Also, the multicultural and multireligious diversity of German society is increasingly reflected in the workforce at Diakoneo, despite church employment law, and in its clients.



Diakoneo's Executive Board has decided to view this diversity not as a problem, but as an opportunity to consciously promote the diversity of employees in terms of cultural and religious background, gender and sexual orientation, and to integrate this diversity into the reality of the company. For example, after the merger and in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, brand communication, vision, and values-oriented communication were reformulated in such a way that no specifically Christian terms are used although the orientation to Christian values is clearly expressed.

This has led and continues to lead to a constructive discussion with internal and external stakeholders about the self-image of the diaconal enterprise and its future development. This is an important step in the development of the Diakoneo company, which is still ongoing.

Transformations

The further development of the Diakoniewerk into a diaconal enterprise involves several transformations that also have a lot to do with the self-understanding of Diakoneo and key individuals, groups, facilities, and components of the enterprise. Understanding these transformations and interpreting them as part of a desired and necessary process of change is essential for creating acceptance and leading Diakoneo into a bright future.

From rector and superior of the sisterhood to board of directors: The role of leadership

In the early days of the Deaconess Institution and well into the twentieth century, operational and strategic management was carried out by the rector and the superior (*Oberin*) of the sisterhood. In a sense, the rector was the head of the institution, and the superior of the sisterhood was the head of the deaconess community. This distinction was, however, very individual and could change with the respective personalities and their priorities. Public perception and historiography, however, have put the focus very much on the work of the rector. Although the principal heads of section and other executives made important contributions to the management and further development of the Deaconess Institution and the Diakoniewerk, from the beginning and over the decades, the rectors have been perceived as those who decisively shaped the institutions. This led to an emphasis on the male factor in the female diaconate, which from today's perspective must be critically questioned. In order to change this, Diakoneo is currently supporting research projects that focus on the contribution of the deaconesses and in particular the superiors of the sisterhood in the development of the diaconal enterprise.

With the change from a deaconess institution to a diaconal organization in the 1970s, the two-fold management was replaced by a single board. The Evangelical Lutheran Diakoniewerk Neuendettelsau was managed by a board of directors, chaired by the rector. In addition to the superior of the sisterhood and the chief administrative officer, the board also included other leaders from the working areas of the Diakoniewerk, for example, the

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departmental directors, the head sister of the associated sisterhood, and the pastor of the brotherhood.

Until the 1990s, the departmental directors were usually pastors, which only changed with the increasing professionalization of diaconal work at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The composition of the board of directors has changed over the years.

With the new articles of incorporation introduced as part of the merger in 2019, the boards and their composition were also reorganized. Diakoneo is governed by a board of directors, which is overseen by a board of trustees and a supervisory board. According to the articles of incorporation, the chief executive officer (who is also chair of the management board) should be a theologian; he or she can use the title "Rector"(!). The board also includes the commercial director and the directors of the business units: education, health, and human services. The superiors lead the communities in Neuendettelsau and Schwäbisch Hall. They are senior employees of Diakoneo and represent their communities on the board of trustees, which is responsible not only for structural matters but also for the diaconal profile of Diakoneo.

This reorganization considered Diakoneo's entrepreneurial aspirations on the one hand and organizational reality on the other. The chief executive officer is first and foremost a manager, leader, and representative of the company to the public. As a theologian, this person is responsible for the ethical standards and the diaconal profile of the company. The one who holds this position, however, is no longer the spiritual leader of an essentially homogeneous religious service community, as was the case in the past, especially in the days of the Deaconess Institution. Because "rector" was no longer correctly understood outside of diaconal and church circles, it is no longer used as a functional designation, but only as a title—and primarily in the church context.

From patriarchal to values-oriented, systemic corporate management

In most of the diaconal institutions and organizations founded in the nineteenth century, management was based on the model of an extended bourgeois family. This was clear from the designations of the individual protagonists. There were the sisters and the brothers, the house father, the house mother, and all belonged to



Leadership guidelines

We as managers at Diakoneo



are role models. Based on our common values and Christian ideals, we act authentically and sustainably - with responsibility and competence.



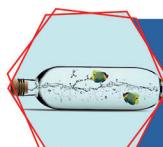
promote open and trusting communication. We give mutual feedback and deal constructively with criticism. We learn from our mistakes to further development.



treat all employees with respect and attentiveness and promote cohesion. We work together as equals.



encourage the exchange of knowledge, enable our employees and teams to develop their personalities and competencies, and strengthen individual responsibility.



create transparency about current and future developments in our area of responsibility, clarity about tasks and requirements and justify our decisions.



accompany our employees and teams as partners and coaches, strengthen and motivate them in their daily work, provide support and create trust.

In this way, we embody the values of DIAKONEO through our leadership actions.

the service community, which was a spiritual construct. Everyone had their own function and role. Authority was not questioned.

What the patriarch ordered was accepted. He was the spiritual and secular leader of the community at the same time and was supported in his tasks by the woman at his side. This image also characterized diaconal work in the Deaconess Institution at Neuendettelsau for a long time, indeed well into the twentieth century. Even in the time of the Diakoniewerk from the 1970s onward, when management was already spread over several shoulders and responsibility was assumed by a committee, this image still had an impact and was only gradually replaced by a more modern understanding of corporate management.

Today, other guiding principles are decisive in the management of Diakoneo. Following a systemic understanding of leadership, value- and meaning-oriented concepts of management are cultivated and pursued. The concept "servant leadership," which goes back to Robert Greenleaf, is an essential, orienting aid that also fits well with the diaconal profile of the company. In line with this concept, leadership guidelines were developed in 2021 with managers to provide day-to-day orientation for leadership activities. These leadership guidelines are shown above.

Following the leadership meeting in 2021, the values communication at Diakoneo was revised and consolidated through an intensive process of discussion and participation for which corporate development was responsible. In addition to the meaning-oriented claim "Diakoneo—because we love life" and the corporate vision, the three core values of Diakoneo were developed.

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To ensure that this values-oriented communication is comprehensible and supportable for all stakeholders, but especially for Diakoneo's employees, the brand, the vision, and the core values were deliberately formulated without specifical Christian terminology, such as charity (*Nächstenliebe*). However, in terms of self-image, the Christian profile is expressed through the values named and described.

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WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL



EMPATHIC

We put ourselves in the position of others and take their needs seriously. In this way we successfully treat one another with respect.



DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE

We see the uniqueness of each individual as an enrichment. That is why we include every individual in our actions.



BRAVE

We go beyond borders and continue to develop Diakoneo both creatively as well as future oriented. We create long-term security by means of innovative and sustainable solutions.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF VALUES

Our values are our conviction, attitude and ideals. They determine how we both wish to act and do act.

OUR DIACONAL-SPIRITUAL PROFILE

Our core values are based on our diaconal-spiritual profile. It describes our understanding of spirituality and is part of our identity.

From deaconess community to Diakoneo community

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were three diaconal communities in the Evangelical Lutheran Diakoniewerk Neuendettelsau. The deaconess community had existed since 1854 and over the years had been the spiritual community that had strongly shaped the profile and perception of the Deaconess Institution and the Diakoniewerk. The service of the deaconesses also laid the foundation for the success of diaconal work in professional and economic terms. The Diaconal Sister- and Brotherhood was formed in 1994 from a merger of the Associated Sisterhood, founded in the 1920s, and the Neuendettelsau Brotherhood, which had existed since the end of the nineteenth century and to which numerous deacons had belonged over the decades. The third community was the Community of Employees in the Diaconate, founded in 1999, which consisted of employees who had been commissioned at a church service to the ecclesiastical office of diakonia (diaconate). These employees had completed fifteen days of further training, a personnel development program that was introduced at Neuendettelsau and other diaconal organizations in Bavaria starting in 1999.

After the merger with Diakoniewerk Schwäbisch Hall to form Diakoneo, two more communities were added to these three Neuendettelsau diaconal communities. The Community of Hall Sisters and Brothers was formed in the 1970s by a merger of the Hall deaconess community and the associated sisters of Hall. The Community of Hall Deaconesses and Deacons brings together all employees who have completed their in-service diaconal training at the Schwäbisch Hall diaconal organization and been consecrated to the diaconate.

Shortly after the merger, the three Neuendettelsau communities began a joint discussion process on the future of the diaconal communities. Occasioned by the nearly simultaneous retirement

of the previous leadership of the three communities—some of whom had been there for many years—and by the changes in the Diakoneo company, the question was raised as to whether common structures and practices could help to develop the communities into the future. Months of deliberation and negotiation led to the creation of the Neuendettelsau Diakoneo Community in October 2020 and the election of a new superior of the sisterhood, who is a pastor—not a deaconess—but became a member of the Diakoneo Community. Currently, the Neuendettelsau Diakoneo Community is establishing new forms of community life in addition to maintaining traditional ones. Together with the company management, it is also redefining the community's contribution to the Diakoneo enterprise.

From spiritual claim to diaconal-spiritual profile

The following description of Diakoneo's diaconal-spiritual profile was adopted by the Board of Trustees in October 2021:

From the very beginning, diaconal work at Diakoneo has been linked to a spiritual profile. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the founders of the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution, Pastor Wilhelm Loehe, and the Schwäbisch Hall Deaconess Institution, Pastor Hermann Faulhaber, understood the urgent need for diaconal work due to the social challenges of the time as an expression of a fundamental Christian attitude and a calling to serve others. This service was primarily performed by women who were trained and consecrated as deaconesses, thus joining a Christian community and, alongside their diaconal work, leading a common spiritual life, including Bible study, daily prayers, and worship services. This spirituality was evangelical Lutheran, like the founders themselves and most of the women who came to the deaconess institution.

In the following decades, this spiritual character as well as the concept of community changed again and again with the changing framework of diaconal work and changing social challenges (the associated sisterhoods, hired employees, church labor law, diaconal education, diaconal organizations, management, etc.).

Two years after the merger of the two diaconal works from Neuendettelsau and Schwäbisch Hall diaconal organizations to form the largest diaconal enterprise in southern Germany, the time has come to redefine the type of spirituality that should shape the interaction between employees and clients at Diakoneo and the external image of the enterprise. On the one hand, the traditions of both former organizations should play a role; on the other hand, there are the current social challenges and the current framework of the diaconal work provided by Diakoneo. First and foremost, however, the needs of employees and clients should be taken into account in determining the diaconal-spiritual profile of Diakoneo. Currently, the diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds among employees and clients of Diakoneo is increasing more and more. Diakoneo sees this diversity as a great opportunity to make the diaconal work more diverse and multi-perspective—it must also be reflected in the diaconal-spiritual profile.¹¹

This description expresses the historical roots of Diakoneo's spirituality but also the need for a redefinition. After a very open definition of spirituality as an "attitude to life searching for meaning and significance" and a naming of the social challenges as a basis for the redefinition, the guidelines for the diaconal-spiritual profile are formulated in this way:

SPIRITUAL OFFERINGS AT DIAKONEO ARE ... SUPPORTIVE AND ORIENTING

Spirituality experienced in community life gives support, structure, and security. Staff and clients recharge their batteries and gain ethical orientation by reflecting on common values. Spiritual offerings and symbols at Diakoneo are intended to strengthen common identity and cohesion—in the day-to-day running of the company, but also in difficult phases and during major changes.

EVANGELICALLY SHAPED AND OPEN TO MULTIPLE RELIGIONS

The spiritual offerings for employees and clients at Diakoneo come from a Christian tradition and are shaped by Christianity—it is a spirituality with recognizable Protestant roots and ecumenical openness. The diversity of influences that Diakoneo's employees and clients bring with them also determines the diversity of the spiritual forms of expression that occur at Diakoneo—from

On the one hand, these guidelines are intended to ensure that spirituality at Diakoneo is perceived as inviting and low-threshold, and on the other hand, they are intended to help ensure that openness to the spiritual needs of clients and employees will continue to be a key profile feature in the future, distinguishing Diakoneo from other non-diaconal competitors in the social and health care sector.

traditional to modern, from conservative to liberal. The spiritual offerings at Diakoneo are target group-oriented, inviting, and inclusive. If the target group of the offering includes people of other religions or non-religious people, care is taken to ensure that they are not taken in or excluded by what is offered. At Diakoneo, members of other religions and non-religious people are also taken seriously with their spiritual needs, and their expression is made possible.

LIFE-AFFIRMING AND LIFE-ACCOMPANYING

The spirituality lived at Diakoneo expresses love for life as well as appreciation for life and all people. It shapes the welcoming culture that characterizes Diakoneo and is an important "plus" for employees and clients. At Diakoneo, important stages in the professional lives of employees, in the lives of clients, and important events in the company are accompanied by a spiritual offering or ritual.

UNDERSTANDABLE AND MODERN

The spiritual offerings of Diakoneo are low-threshold and also understandable for people who do not have a Christian background or experience with Christian spirituality. They take up cultural and content-related impulses from society and deal with them.

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11. *Das Diakonisch-Spirituelle Profil von Diakoneo*, October 2021.

is taken up and developed further for the future of Diakoneo as a diaconal enterprise.

From pastoral service to Diaconal-Theological Service

In addition to the pastor serving as the chief executive officer, the Deaconess Institution, Diakoniewerk, and Diakoneo have always had other pastors active in their various operations. Pastoral service, including pastoral care and worship services, was usually oriented to need and specifically adapted to the respective field of activity.

In the course of the new organizational structure introduced with the merger, pastoral service was also regulated across the board and became a central service called Diaconal-Theological Service. It was given a management that belongs to the management conference of the central services and, similar to personnel, information technology, etc., performs a cross-sectional task for the company in coordination with the business areas. The employees of the Diaconal-Theological Service are pastors, deacons, religious educators and a church musician, who are responsible for spirituality, pastoral care, and diaconal education at Diakoneo in the business areas. This structure ensures that these services can be offered in a manner oriented to demand and in line with the needs of clients and employees.

From spiritual center to spiritual place: The function of St. Laurentius Church

In the past, St. Laurentius Church (*Laurentiuskirche*) in Neuendettelsau was often seen as the “spiritual center” of the Neuendettelsau Deaconess Institution and the Neuendettelsau Diakoniewerk. It was here that central festive services were held, where senior staff members were installed and blessed for their service in the context of a worship service, and where the deaconesses met for their daily prayers. Although there have always been churches and chapels in other institutions—such as the Church of the Good Shepherd (*Kirche zum guten Hirten*) in Polzingen, St. Martin’s Church (*Martinskirche*) in Bruckberg, and numerous house chapels in retirement homes—St. Laurentius Church has always been something special. Here the tradition of the evangelical Mass, which Loehe gave new life, was cultivated; church music was given a special role; and Vespers, Matins, and Compline were held regularly. In fact, the diaconal congregation of St. Laurentius had developed into a second evangelical Lutheran congregation in the small town of Neuendettelsau, which offered a distinctive spiritual option to the population.

Since 2015, after various discussions within the congregational council of the diaconal congregation as well as strategic discussions in the board of directors it was deemed necessary to develop a new profile for the Laurentius Church. It was to be much more strongly related to the needs of the employees and clients of Diakoneo and not just duplicate what is already provided by the St. Nikolai congregation in Neuendettelsau. The congregational council developed a profile for St. Laurentius, according to which the Laurentius Church should be a place for inclusive spiritual offering,

a place for experimenting with diaconal spirituality, and a place for visitors. The implementation of this profile was accelerated by the Coronavirus pandemic, during which time neither worship services nor church music events could take place in person. Due to pandemic regulations these were prohibited for a long time, and the daily prayers were moved to the deaconesses’ retirement homes. In recent times, the spiritual offerings provided now follow much more closely the concept for a new profile sketched above. Worship services have been further developed to be inclusive, more low-threshold, and geared to Diakoneo’s target groups. At the same time, the claim that the Laurentius Church is the spiritual center of Diakoneo has been abandoned. *The Diaconal-Spiritual Profile of Diakoneo* (see above) makes clear that spirituality at Diakoneo takes place in many places and is multifaceted. In the future, St. Laurentius will continue to develop into one of Diakoneo’s many places where spiritual offerings take place and where Diakoneo’s clients and employees meet, exchange ideas, and enjoy togetherness in the community.

Continuity and Discontinuity

This historical review has demonstrated that in the seventeen decades since diaconal work was begun by Wilhelm Loehe, there have been numerous changes and developments in the organization, structure, content, and nature of diaconal service. Again and again, opportunities have been seized, challenges accepted, and adjustments made to the changing framework of diaconal work. As a result, today one must conclude that diaconal work in the twenty-first century looks completely different from Loehe’s time in the nineteenth century. But what is it that unifies diaconal work at Neuendettelsau across the ages?

What Diakoneo in 2022, the Diakoniewerk in 1982, and the Deaconess Institution in 1858 have in common is that people in diaconal work are led by Christian values and provide help and support to others in the challenges to both their health and social well-being and so to experience a deeper meaning and significance for themselves and for life in general.

What has changed over the years is the way in which people work together as a community, be it as part of a community of faith and life, as with the deaconesses, or as part of a religiously and culturally diverse community of service, as with the current employees. The way in which they express their need for spirituality has changed: from a more homogeneous evangelical Lutheran character and liturgically demanding forms, such as the daily prayers and the evangelical Mass, to a multi-religious openness and diverse, low-threshold forms of spirituality. The understanding of the professions has also changed: the way of decision-making in the company, the corporate management, the external appearance and, and, and ...

What remains constant is this: diaconal work is both necessary and important and at all times needs to be carried out according to the demands of society and oriented to the individual needs of people “because”—according to our motto—“we love life.”