



DEACONS TERESE TOUVELLE AND JANINE JOHNSON WITH WARTBURG SEMINARY PROFESSOR EMERITUS, DR. NORMA COOK EVERIST AT THE 2018 SYNOD ASSEMBLY OF THE SOUTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD OF THE ELCA.

# Deacon Terese TouVelle makes connections through Footbridge, Inc.

"It's just a matter of listening," says TouVelle. "Strangers helping strangers and showing God's love. There are needs everywhere. People want to show God's love they just don't always know where or how." -Deacon Terese TouVelle

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Being a "Sunday Morning Pastor" wasn't ever part of the plan for 2015 alum Deacon Terese TouVelle, who is rostered in the Southeastern Iowa Synod. For her, the call of Deacon is showing God's love, claiming her voice, and working collaboratively in her community. This call manifested in the creation of a non-profit organization, Footbridge, Inc., a bridge between the needs of the community and resources in Davenport, Iowa.

"As soon as I heard about Diaconal Ministry I said, 'THAT'S IT!' It was just so beautiful. I just knew. So that's what I did. It was really, really hard, but I graduated and here I am!" says TouVelle of her education in the Master of Arts Diaconal Ministry (MADM) program at Wartburg Theological Seminary.

Through many conversations about discernment with professors like Dr. Norma Cook Everist, Dr. Roy Carroll, Dr. Craig Nesson and staff like Rev. Amy Current, TouVelle felt empowered and supported to complete her ELCA Candidacy and her MA Degree and to create what she calls "connections" using her gifts and passions as a Deacon in the ELCA. "Everyone has different gifts," says TouVelle. "The professors at Wartburg Seminary want to see their students succeed and they want the Church to succeed. We all show God's love in different ways. It's not just a little box people are supposed to fit inside of."

Rev. Amy Current, Vice President for Admissions and Student Services and a follower of Footbridge, Inc. on Facebook, says, "Deacon candidates often discern specializations using their gifts to serve the Gospel as a bridge at the edge of the congregation and community. Terese's vision for Footbridge, Inc. is incarnational embodiment of Gospel connections. I love

watching Facebook posts and seeing the bridges being created through Footbridge, Inc."

Terese tells a story about one Sunday morning when she filled in for the pastor at a local church. An elderly woman approached her after the service to say she couldn't hear the sermon. This woman, who used hearing aids and participated the best she could through the service, told TouVelle that despite having the hearing aids themselves, she couldn't afford the batteries to make them work. TouVelle started talking to other people in her community and found this to be a common issue among the elderly. As luck would have it, or through the work of the Holy Spirit, a week later a phone call came into Footbridge. "I have a weird question, but if I can ask anybody weird questions it's you. My husband ordered 90 hearing aid batteries. They came in the mail, but they are the wrong size. The company told us to throw them away, they're sending us new ones. Do you know anywhere I could donate them?" Other similar phone calls have come in recently from families cleaning out the homes of loved ones. According to TouVelle, the prohibitive cost of batteries for hearing aids is a common issue she hears from people in her community. She's been able to help many with the donations Footbridge has received.

The bridges TouVelle is creating change lives. She's working with folks bound to their homes to write cards for veterans on Honor Flights in and out of the Quad Cities. TouVelle helps to coordinate the collection and delivery of the cards to involve as many as possible in this special experience for veterans.



FOOTBRIDGE, INC. COLLECTS AND DELIVERS CARDS FOR VETERANS ON HONOR FLIGHTS IN THE QUAD CITIES, IOWA. OVER 100 CARDS WERE COLLECTED FOR THE HONOR FLIGHT IN EARLY JUNE 2018.



She's coordinating volunteers for schools to listen to children read. The volunteers love the relationship they build with the students, the kid's test scores are increasing steadily, and the teachers are thrilled with the assistance. She shares that she's able to keep Footbridge, Inc. costs low since the school handles the background checks and training.

These connections are happening all over the place in the Quad Cities. A child's glasses are broken? TouVelle connects them to the Lion's Club. Not enough chaperones for the school field trip? Give her a few days. Plants are being donated for a meditation garden in the community. Purses filled with personal care items, makeup, hand sanitizers, and tissues (all from different donors), put together by a church's confirmation class are donated to a domestic abuse shelter to empower women searching and interviewing for jobs. When a bicycle is donated, TouVelle finds a counselor

who works with families in transition. Footbridge makes the bridge and lets the connection happen. She explains that she tries to only ask for time or items that were going to be donated anyway – rather than monetary donations.

People in the community are realizing the work that TouVelle is shepherding. She is absolutely living out the mission of Wartburg Seminary by proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ for a world in need.

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## MASTER OF ARTS *in* DIACONAL MINISTRY

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