The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.” (Luke 1:28)

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (Matthew 1:23)

“Immanuel” or, “God with us.”

God was present from before the beginning of the world. His Spirit was hovering over the waters in the beginning when the Word, which is God himself, created the world; then came the man, one created in his own image, whose life originated from the breath of life. Although we were separated from God by our sinful nature, God constantly called us back to him and to complete his love towards us, God gave us the ultimate way of reconciliation through his own Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God came to this world to be with us when we had rejected him and through his blood on the Cross, we regained our citizenship in the kingdom of God where our Lord’s Holy Presence is with us.

Christmas is the day that marks this remarkable event of Immanuel and we look back on the past year to examine how closely we have walked with our Lord and pray that we will remain in him and him in us – to have Christ born in us all the time and as the angel told Maria, to rejoice because the Lord is with us. Immanuel!

Now in the following letter I would like to share how God has blessed us by being with us through the year 2016.

A year has passed since we moved our mother centre from Cheon-an to Mok-po. This move has made it possible for us to have close fellowship between sisters in the mother centre and those serving social needs in Mok-po who were formerly separated into two locations. We are now able to understand and support each other better.

We did more landscaping around the mother centre. We planted vegetables such as beans, sesames, pumpkins, potatoes and lettuces; we paved the roads and parking lot area with gravels and laid lawn in the front garden; planted more flowers to bloom all seasons; and made a pond where we are raising carp and freshwater snails under pink lotus flowers. In this rich environment, we hold prayer meetings three times a day.
On the 1st of May, we had our 36th Anniversary service. Neighbours, benefactors and fellow church workers came together to celebrate. Pfr. Dorothea Schweizer and Karina Schumacher of EMS (Evangelisches Missionswerk in Suedwest-Deutschland), Bishop Park of Korean Anglican Church, and Br. Sylvain of Taizé Community also joined us in our celebration. Mr. Kim Sung Jae, the chairman of Korean Diakonia Social Welfare Foundation, made a speech on the topic of “giving ourselves as living offerings to God through the life of Diakonia”. Diaokonia Family Community and Secular Community made special musical performances making the occasion even more jubilant.

On the 4th of March, our sisters participated in the Prayer for the World event hosted by Sangrak Church in Mok-po. The theme for this year was “to receive Jesus like the little children” (Mark 10:13-16) based on the service prepared by the Christian women in Cuba. Jesus asks us to receive the underprivileged little ones in our time as Jesus himself. Through this event we prayed together with the Christian sisters in Cuba, as well as all the underprivileged of the world, for the peace of the Lord.

Every year since 1991, at 3 pm. on Good Friday, we have held ecumenical service reflecting on the Passion of Christ. This year was no exception. 33 Christians from neighbouring churches came to our mother centre, held a service together and walked the ‘Road of the Cross’ we had prepared on the hill behind the mother centre. Through this we witnessed the love of Jesus that binds us together.

Diakonia Sisterhood also plays a crucial role in the community church movement in Korea. From 4th to 6th of July, two of our sisters participated in the leadership training programme offered by the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS) of Korea. The theme was “Returning to the Origin!: Communities that Witness the Kingdom of God” and our sisters led a discussion on the role of spirituality. On the 12th of August, our sisters led morning prayer sessions at the Korean Community Church Leadership Training programme at Huangmae Youth Centre in Kyong-nam Province.

Between 31st August and 2nd September, 22 members of Shinseon Martial Art Team (a martial art team based in Europe) visited the sisterhood. They have made annual visits to our sisterhood for over 30 years and they were the first to help our tuberculosis patients by providing services such as foot baths, massage and sea bathing. This year, apart from their usual activities, they also prepared a special performance to lift
the spirits of the elderly patients. For three days they laboured and brought joy that the sisters alone could not provide. They also raise funds in Europe to support our centre. In memory of their 30 years of constant friendship and love, we made a plaque saying “You Are So Beautiful” and gave to these angels from foreign land.

Our friends and affiliated organizations also had a vibrant year in God. Between 28th and 29th October, Danbi Family Community held Diakonia Spirituality Training programme with total 29 participants, including sisters from Diakonia Sisterhood, Family Community, Secular Community and other interested individuals. We shared stories and prayer topics from our life, strengthening each other for their works of Diakonia in the church and in the society.

On Christmas Day three members of Secular Community came to visit us from Cheon-an and we went out for carol singing in the neighbourhood together. Moreover, three people received baptism during the Christmas Service and another received confirmation. May God continue to bless and keep those who were reborn on this day!

Diakonia Secular Community continues to meet once a month to share their life and to pray for each other. This is the congregation of families endeavouring to walk with God, carrying out the work of Diakonia in their daily life.

Our sisters also had an end-of-the-year retreat for three days from the 31st December meditating on the works of our Lord in our life.

On the 3rd of October, Danbi Family Community in Cheon-an held a five-year anniversary service. They are also running the ‘Doran Doran Elderly Day-Care Centre’ where they look after 15 elderly people providing them entertainments and rehabilitation programmes.

The Family Community in Jin-an stepped-up organic farming. For the past three years they had to labour to transform the land from chemical to organic farming and this year, their labour finally paid off in plentiful harvest of chillies, blueberries, tomatoes and cabbages.

Our social welfare programmes also experienced the Presence of God throughout 2016.

In June, Diakonia House for Elderly was again nominated the best long-term care centre for the year 2015 by Korean National Health Insurance Corporation. 2 sisters and 38 staff look after 60 senior citizens providing them with comforts, doing their best under
difficult circumstances, persevering occasional abuses from people suffering from dementia.

We cooperate with various other organizations in Korea to provide support to families in need. Through this linkage, we have supported households with single-parent, grandparents-grandchildren, multicultural families and refugees from North Korea. Especially during the Mid-Autumn Festival – a traditional Korean festival in September – we provided food and daily necessities to 65 households. North Korean refugees are in great need of clothes especially.

Diakonia Scholarship Foundation supports multicultural and refugee families by providing scholarships and counselling to the children. 27 students received full scholarship for their education. We are very thankful to see three of them graduating from high school this year overcoming difficult circumstances.

We also continue to provide supports to the five individuals in the chronic patients domiciliary care services. We provide health care, entertainment, emotional and spiritual support for them. Last spring, two of our elderly in the family were diagnosed with cancer during regular health check: Mr. Kim who had for 30 years been enslaved to work in a salt field and Mr. Koh, who had long suffered from tuberculosis. Mr. Kim went through a difficult surgery and radiation therapy and is currently under chemotherapy. We pray that Immanuel Jesus be with us and with these two souls.

South Korea is undergoing a period of revolution. People are gathering at places all over Korea with candles in their hands to shed lights into the darkness that had concealed corruption of the regime in the past. We pray that the truth and righteousness of the Lord will prevail in our society. We pray that the Good News of the baby Jesus who came to this world as the light proclaimed from all rooftops of the world. We pray in thanks giving for all of you who have remembered us in your prayers all these years. #

Blessings and peace of our Lord be upon you and your community in the New Year.

31st December 2016,

Sr. Ree Young Sook
Abbess, Diakonia Sisterhood in Korea