

The Dr. E. H. Johnson Luncheon Address
Tuesday, June 5, 2012,
Durham College, Oshawa, Ontario
Sister Eun Sook Han, Diakonia Sisterhood Korea

On this honorable occasion before my friends in Christ, I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to the Presbyterian Church of Canada and especially all of those who have worked very hard to find me and honor me as the recipient of E.H. Johnson Award for this year, 2012.

I also would like to give thanks to God who made me and gave me a serving spirit and good character to live together with my neighbors in love.

I also would like to express my gratitude to my beloved parents, who are now in heaven, for having inherited me Christian faith, which is the most precious gift I will cherish forever.

I also want to acknowledge my teacher, the belated Dr. Ahn, Byung Moo who taught me how to live life as a follower of Christ.

Most of all, I would like to express my appreciation and share this honor and joy with all the Diakonia sisters whom I dearly love and have worked together as one family in Christ.

Upon receiving the award, I am very humbled because I wonder I really deserve to receive the award. I know how I have lived and what I have done is not noticeably great. I have only been doing what I, as a follower of Christ, am supposed to do.

So, I was very hesitant to accept it when I heard I have been chosen as a recipient of this award. My first reaction was “Why me? I cannot accept such an honorable award for such a trivial insignificant life I have lived!”

However, I am standing here with courage and humility because I figure that it is not my personal achievement but the Diakonia Sisterhood you are honoring today.

I have been serving as a member of the Diakonia sisterhood for 32 years. I and five other sisters founded the Protestant monastic community, named the Diakonia Sisterhood on the first of May in 1980 under the guidance of belated Dr. An, Byung Moo, who is well known for his Minjung theology.

You may be interested to find out how I came to think of living as a sister. To make a long story short, I graduated from the Hanshin University, formerly called Han-kuk theological seminary, in September, 1975. Right after I graduated, I was involved in the urban mission for the poor which was supported by the Seoul Presbyterian WM

association. I was chosen as the first missionary for this urban mission project to the poorest area in Chun-ge-chun.

At the time, it was the worst slum area in Seoul. People were living on the river bank where all the polluted water was flowing into and smelled really bad. They built shelters on the bank with blocks, pieces of wood and boxes, and covered them with plastic sheets for roofing so that at least they could protect themselves from rain and snow. When I went there to begin my mission in November 1975, the ghetto on the Dduk-bang (river bank) had been forcefully removed by the government. Some people managed to receive some compensation from the government and moved out to another slum.

However, the rest without money and place to live, they put up temporary tents on the ground covering it with plastic garbage bags to survive through the winter. I lived in a small room which the women's mission rented for me. I covered the floor with four pieces of Japanese straw mats and installed a char-coal stove at the center of the room for heating and cooking because there was no kitchen. My mother and father visited me once to see how I lived, and they cried silently, looking at the miserable living condition. However, I was sorry for the fact that I had the char-coal heater at least and slept in the heated room. So, I invited children to my room and fed them with rice my parents sent me. Because there was no fresh water, they could not take shower or wash their clothes. Because of the insanitary condition, the children were infested with lice. Some of them did not go to school because their parents could not afford school fees. Young mothers wanted to go to work but they could not because they had to take care of their children. Those mothers made earnings by peeling garlic and roots all day long. They survived with porridge made of wheat flour.

They had been neglected by the government, and lived hopelessly in loneliness and desperation. When those people saw a person who came to them with love and care, they were encouraged and began to have a new hope. I was happy to see them happy. I worked 365 days a year without a break for them. I worked from the early morning till late night. I established a nursery school to take care of the little children from 3 to 7 years of age from early in the morning until their mothers came home from work in the late evening.

I also established the women's association to teach them how to read and write Korean, English, Chinese characters and some common sense knowledge. Later with some of them I established the Dduk-bang church. I also established the credit union for them so they could save money to rent a house later. I also found financial supporters and connected them to the children who could not go to elementary school.

After two years of hard work, I was able to move to a more spacious place for a children's house and hired a nursery teacher for children. I also rented a room in the neighbor's house for my own space. From the early morning till night I was busy, leading the early morning prayer, running the nursery school, and counseling women. I had to

walk more than 4 km to visit the families who were unable to come to the credit union to deposit money. I collected the deposit money from them and did the book-keeping for them over the midnight.

After three years of mission there at Dduk-bang in June, 1978, I heard good news from the professor Ahn, Byung Moo who taught me at the college. He told me his wish to establish a Protestant women's monastic community. Even though I was happy to do all the works at Dduk-bang, I always felt limited as a single woman to handle all the works alone. I was very happy to find out that there were women who had a vision like me to do God's work together as one body of Christ. So, for the effective way to do God's work, I chose the communal life.

After the trial period of living a communal life for one and a half year, finally on the first of May in 1980 I and five other members had the inauguration service for commencement of the Korea Diakonia sisterhood.

The Korea Diakonia Sisterhood accepts the Lord Jesus' calling in obedience: "Follow me. Whoever follows me must deny herself and follow me with her own cross. Whoever comes to me must abandon even her parents, children, brothers or sisters."

We believe and confess that it is Jesus Christ who has led us to this way of life and pray that we may love God with all our heart and with all of our soul and with all of our strength, and at the same time love our neighbors by serving them.

We believe and confess that the way to love God is possible only by loving our neighbors. Jesus taught us, "if you give a cup of cold water to a little child, you have done it to me." So, we try our best to help our neighbors, the suffering people who are in pain and yet neglected. Our neighbors are TB patients, who are abandoned by their families and government. We take care of them if they have no place to go to even after they have been cured. Our neighbors are the homeless, the aged, the young people who have inherited from their parents poverty and thus have no way to go to school, the farmers and fishers who have been removed from their homes because of the government policy for urbanization, the poor city dwellers, and the disabled ones. They are the neighbors whom we, Diakonia sisters, serve today at Mokpo.

All these works we do together in the Diakonia Sisterhood may not be possible unless God helps us. Today, we are operating a sanatorium for the old aged people. We serve over fifty people. My role for them is to plan their diet and feed those who cannot move their hands and feet. I have also operated the scholarship protect for more than 20 years. We came to know that poverty is inherited to the next generations, so in order to cut the cycle of poverty, we have begun this family revival welfare project and began to offer them scholarship. We not only give them scholarship to cover their schooling completely but also hold various programs and events for them like camps, trips, mountain climbing, and psychological test for holistic care. We raise the fund by the annual Dakonia bazaar.

The prize I am receiving today will go to the scholarship fund for this year. I thank you very much for that reason.

I have lived the life of servanthood for thirty five years. I have learned an important truth as I serve my neighbors. The truth is that it is not I who give them life by my sacrifice and support. Rather, it is they who give me life. I owe them my life because they have given me opportunities to love and serve.

Loving and serving neighbors is not just giving them something to eat. Rather, it is to share joy and pain, to give hope and courage by taking responsibility over those who would be hopeless unless you took care of them. Our neighbors are the sick, the helpless, the imprisoned, the social outcast, the oppressed, the poor, the disabled, and the weak. If I ignore them, I am sinning against my Lord Jesus Christ.

I will conclude with the word of the Lord. On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, “Teacher, he asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law and how do you read it? The expert answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly, Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

It is true! “Do this and you will live.” By serving, you will live. I would like to emphasize once more this wonderful principle of God’s kingdom: We live by living for “you”. May God bless you all as you continue on serving God and neighbors in Jesus’ name!