



Common Letter No. 26
Mother Angela Strobel, OSB
Rome, January 27, 2011

Dear Sisters,

We (Sr. Maoro and myself) are back in Rome - physically, at least; our soul still has to follow after a long time in Korea: Sr. Maoro, since 1st of June last year, and I, for 6 months although with an interruption of two months after our visitation in Seoul.

So this is an opportune moment to share a little bit about our visitation in Daegu. Thanks to the good preparation and the hard work of Sr. Maoro, everything went smoothly. The 32 communities in Daegu (Korea) are located in 8 dioceses. There are two communities abroad working for Korean immigrants in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Los Angeles, United States. Most of you know that the Priory has two big hospitals: Daegu Fatima and Changwon Fatima. The hospital communities are, in number, like the Priory House Communities elsewhere. The majority of the stations are Parish communities, and sometimes the Sisters also run a kindergarten. The Sisters manage one school for girls in a poor rural area and work in three rehabilitation centers for handicapped. Social welfare ministry is increasing. Last year an outreach community – Sarangsaem - was established, whose ministry is the management of and teaching in a school for the handicapped. This school belongs to the Diocesan rehabilitation Institute and was taken over by our Sisters in 2002. Several hundred handicapped children and young adults have a home here. Sarangsaem, Korean for “fountain of love” is indeed a proper name for what our Sisters try to be, here and elsewhere. In 2009, the Priory realized the long-standing plan of a Spirituality Center. The building stands next to the Priory House and a local community was established to run the center. The construction fits so well into the natural environment that it received a silver medal from Daegu City for its eco-friendly architecture. Also eco-friendly is the Spirituality Center’s geothermal heating and cooling system installed last year.

Fourteen Sisters of the Priory are on foreign mission, mainly in Africa and in the Generalate District. The missionary consciousness is alive, especially among the young ones. Thus we hope that more will follow, for the needs in some places are really urgent.

I had expected to find in Korea something like the title of Archabbot Norbert Weber’s book written in 1914 after he had visited Korea in 1911 “*Im Lande der Morgenstille*” –

In the Country of MORNING CALM! But I experienced that everything here goes fast. In former times, I was told, Korea was a quiet country, now, however, it has been reached by the hectic pace of modern society.

Nevertheless, the Priory has an On-going Formation Program which gives justice to the oriental contemplative soul. Imagine, aside from many other offerings, Sisters can have a 30 days' Retreat every five years! During our time there, a group of fifteen Sisters had such a retreat for Bible Reading. I am really happy that Lectio Divina is taking profound roots in the life of the Priory.

We met all Sisters personally, which was a real enrichment for us. There was no time for sightseeing, but Sisters were very inventive and diligent to arrange short visits to famous places by detours on our way back from the stations to the Priory House. Thus I could appreciate some of the rich cultural and natural heritage. Going by car to the stations and especially on the longer trip to Seoul, the beautiful countryside unfolded before my eyes, hills and mountains, empty rice fields and something unique: everywhere on the slopes you can see the typical tombs, grass covered small hills with a memorial stone or steles. There is a strong sense of the communion between the living and the dead.

In the beginning of January we had the "North Korean" Committee Meeting. M. Prioress Abraham and the other members from Seoul Priory came by car to Daegu, in spite of bad winter weather. This time the meeting came to really concrete actions. There seems to be the possibility to send rice to Wonsan (place of our first convent) through some contact person in China. Of course there is also a financial question because it must be a big amount of rice. But I am sure this will not be a problem since we are all eager to save these poor people from starving.

During our stay there was a big tension between North and South Korea. Experts were really worried that the situation might escalate. However, I could not perceive too much fear. Sisters say: "we are continuously in an uncertain situation. "We never know what North Korea will do". - What we do know is that we have to pray!

On February 10, nine Sisters will make their Final Profession in Daegu; the new archbishop of Daegu, Thaddaeus Cho will preside the celebration. On the previous days, four novices will pronounce their first profession and 2 postulants will become novices. Although it is not a statistical proof, the reality is that the vocations are decreasing in Korea and this is a worry aired many times. During our visitation there were 13 novices – for many Priors a dream number. Their vocation stories show that they started to come for the vocation seekers programs when a nice Sister or somebody else personally invited them to come; the website also is a help. The Seoul Priory is happy that after a desert time they now have again 4 candidates. In the middle of January a seminar for Junior Sisters took place with the theme: "Solidarity with the Poor". The Juniors of Seoul Priory participated with their formator. It is nice to see the growing collaboration between the two Korean Priors.

I cannot but mention also the old Sisters in the Priory House, the Galilee group. They radiate peace and joy; I only regret that my communication does not go much beyond “How are you”? and “sleep well!”, I would really enjoy to listen to their stories, of how they fled from North Korea and started anew in the South. Some left their whole family in the North without having ever heard from them again.

We could still participate in the anticipated name day celebration of Mother Lumen, which was also our farewell. Many Sisters from the outstations came for early Vespers and a joyful evening program. We are aware that when we come next time probably the quiet environment of the Priory House will have changed. At this time, works are going on to build a road just passing our wall and instead of the beautiful mountains the Sisters will have to admire apartments, but this will also open a new promising mission field.

Now, here in the Casa Community there is “high life” during these months of January and February. A dream became true. During the last four years we hosted RB Courses in English given by Sr. Aquinata. This year we succeeded to have one for Portuguese speaking monastics. The participants come from Brazil, Argentina, Portugal and Angola. Speaking of Angola, Sr. Crescenciana Chilimbo from Angola has been here since September to work on the Angolan Liturgy book with the help of Sr. Celestine.

While we were still in Korea, we heard the highly positive and happy feedback of the Daegu Oblates who, on a pilgrimage, stayed at our Casa. In spite of a reduced Casa community the Sisters worked hard and well. We are glad that our guests spread the reputation of the true Benedictine Hospitality of our Casa Santo Spirito.

Due also to the good work of our General Secretary and her assistant you received the updated information on the Schematismus. One important information, however, is surely not there yet. Haus St. Benedikt in Tutzing is happy to have Sr. Ursula Fuchs from Angola for a long needed help in the infirmary.

Now, also the Generalate will start to work hard - beginning with the most urgent task of initiating the preparation for our next General Chapter. Soon you will be getting some work, too!

A great Feast Day is near, and soon we will celebrate our Saint – Scholastica - whose “life was hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3,3) and, therefore, was blessed with the extraordinary power of love. Happy Feast Day to all!

With gratitude, especially for your faithful prayer during our visitation,

Sr. Angela OSB