Address by Deaconess Ruth Felgentreff on the occasion of the reopening of the motherhouse
on May 7, 2003

On the history of the motherhouse - the past becomes the future

„Dear guests from the Kaiserswerther Verband and our friendly sisterhoods, dear Kaiserswerther sisters, it really has been a success! After a good year and a half of renovation work, we are welcoming our new motherhouse. Hardly any of us believed that we would be able to celebrate this event on time. But the unthinkable became reality, and today we are gratefully celebrating with our guests.I have been asked to tell you something of the history of this building to mark today's occasion.

Our small town of Kaiserswerth and our Kaiserswerther Diakonie have one thing in common: wherever you look, you encounter history at every turn. And the motherhouse is part of this history. It actually began when Pastor Disselhoff, Theodor Fliedner's successor, seized a favorable opportunity that unexpectedly presented itself to him and thus put an end to many years of grievances. We all still have the images of last summer's flood disasters in our minds. Until 1926, Kaiserswerth was usually flooded twice a year. As a result, the water from the Rhine penetrated the apartments and left damp and sponge in the walls. In the houses of the deaconesses' home, the dampness was compounded by the increasingly cramped conditions, which made life and work even more difficult. And when the doctor had to travel through the streets by barge and could only reach his patients through the window of the lower floor, it may seem amusing to us today, but for those involved it was a hard everyday life. The sanitation authorities were openly demanding that the conditions be improved. It was clear to everyone: only a new building could solve the problem! But where to get the land? Only a few minutes away from the town lay the land of Prince von Hatzfeld on flood-free land, but as an entailed estate it was inaccessible, as an entailed estate could not be divided without the permission of the sovereign. Fliedner had to leave the unsolved problem to his successor Julius Disselhoff. The turning point came completely unexpectedly. In September 1877, an imperial manèover was announced in Kalkum. The Emperor and Empress arranged to have tea with Prince von Hatzfeld, and the Empress also planned a visit to the Deaconess Institution. This visit took place on September 5, 1877. Pastor Disselhoff skillfully used the opportunity to speak on the spot about the pressing space problems, which in the meantime had become a question of existence. The Empress was able to convince herself personally of the correctness of Disselhoff's explanations. Pastor Disselhoff was successful with his visual instruction. He was first able to acquire land on the Johannisberg and later on the Fronberg. The new institutional buildings were built on this contiguous - flood-free - land. The Kaiserswerth citizens were soon able to observe that things were starting to move at the deaconry. In 1878, the foundation stone was laid on the Johannesberg for the new sanatorium, which was inaugurated in 1881. A magnificent park was available for the patients. On the part of the Fronberg called “Himmelreich”, the orphans were given a new home. Children had been living on the site since 1883. The development of the Fronberg had begun. Very soon, walkers on the Fronberg could see a lot of building activity: Work began on the new hospital. For the 50th anniversary of the deaconess institution in 1886, the building planned as the hospital's administration building was inaugurated. During these celebrations, the decision was made to relocate the other institutions, especially the

motherhouse, from the town to the Fronberg. In addition, a nurses' hospital, an after-work house and the church as the centerpiece were planned.

I assume you entered the motherhouse through its main portal. You may have noticed the dove with the olive branch above the portal and read the two year numbers 1836 - 1886. Not only do they together represent fifty years of history of the deaconess institution, but each individual number, taken separately, signifies a new beginning. Those who were able to decipher the writing discovered Fliedner's motto, which he made the motto for the deaconess institution: ¨ John 3:30 - He must increase, but I must decrease. Nowadays, most people are struggling to spell out the text, but back in the 19th century (1886), it was part of the core of Christian thought. It took 14 years from the decision to build to the laying of the foundation stone. The Bielefeld architect Siebold, who was well known in church circles, was commissioned to design the entire building complex. The aim was to create a self-contained unit comprising the motherhouse, the nurses' hospital, the Feierabendhaus and the motherhouse church as the focal point. The administrative building was to have a wing on the south side and a wing on the north side, as we know it today. Today, the whole thing presents itself to the observer as a typical example of neo-Gothic style, protected as a monument. On January 21, 1900, the 100th birthday of Theodor Fliedner, the foundation stone was laid for the motherhouse church and thus for the entire institution. A good three years later, the inauguration took place on May 7, 1903 with a large public attendance. It was, as we would say today, a real media event. A solemn service was held in the parent church by Georg Fliedner, Fliedner's oldest son, to bid farewell to the church and the old motherhouse. A long procession moved from the Gartenhäuschen to the Kaiserswerther Markt, through the town, the Schleifergasse and finally through the gate onto the new grounds. We owe the number of participants in this procession to Kaiserswerth castles. They stood at the roadside with interest, enjoyed the unique spectacle and counted 1,030 participants! In all Kaiserswerth publications, but especially in the “Greetings from the Kaiserswerth Motherhouse to its Sisters”, the festivities were described in such detail that all those who could not be in Kaiserswerth had the opportunity to relive them later. The “greetings” also contained a very precise description of the individual rooms and their future use. For the deaconesses, this day meant saying goodbye to something familiar that they had loved along with its mantle. At the same time, however, it was a hopeful departure to a new, as yet unknown land. And that was the plan for the new institutions on the Fronberg: The motherhouse was to become the center for diaconal science and work. This is where the pre-trial and trial nurses were to be prepared for their life in the community. Here they were to undergo further training and education. From here they were to be sent out to the many stations at home and abroad and here they were to come back to rest and recharge their batteries. 3 Here they were to be at home and find the people who had prepared them for their journey and who were still willing to give them advice and help. Above all, they were to experience community here. A big program for a big house! “What happened to this program?” I was asked a few weeks ago. This is not just a question for me, but for all the sisters who have passed through this house for decades. As one of them, I would like to venture a cautious answer: in this house we experienced the reality of everyday life with all its ups and downs. we loved this house and still love it. When we entered, we went through the motherhouse gate, depending on our temperament, hesitant, hopeful or simply curious about what was to come. We have lived in this house. We learned the ABCs of everyday diaconal life. We were sent out to try out what we had learned or to continue learning and broaden our horizons. Above all, however, we experienced a lot of sisterly

fellowship. The motherhouse, where we experienced so much, became more and more the center of our lives. And one day we returned to the motherhouse, each in our own special way. One day we came home. The motherhouse had fulfilled its program, the good old one. Thanks be to him. That sounds like the end, but it's not, because it - the motherhouse - continues today as something completely new. Like the old motherhouse, it has already developed a program; like the old motherhouse, it will have to be tested and possibly even changed. As in the old motherhouse, people will come and go, and they will help write the history of this house. The sisterhood will also continue to have its place in this house, as original residents, so to speak. But something is different from 1903 and will remain different: We - the sisters - are no longer the focus of all the planning in the house. We are one group of many, the natives, as I said before. That may not be so easy for us. Facts sometimes have a way of being hard. But that is also an experience: there is freedom in accepting them. So we say thank you for a rich history and wish God's blessing on what is yet to come. I have chosen the following heading for this report: “The past that becomes the future”. God grant that this thesis, which means a wish, will come true.