



CHRISTIAN FRIENDS OF KOREA

조선의 그리스도인 벗들

Bringing Hope and Healing to the People of North Korea in the Name of Christ Since 1995

WINTER 2021

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.
Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.
...**Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer...**
Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
Live in harmony with one another...
If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone...
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

- From Romans 12 -

In late fall, the North Korean earth is still warm and moist, but the air bites sharply with the approach of winter. On still early mornings, dense fog forms, obscuring all but just the nearest few feet of road directly ahead. In years past, we have often traveled this very stretch of road completely surrounded by this impenetrable fog – so dense that we could only creep forward a few yards at a time. The headlights of our vehicle gave some illumination, but ultimately were no match for this fog – only the steady, intense persistence of the morning sun would eventually burn it away and gradually clear the path before us.

As we approach the end of another long year of unexpected challenges and trials of many kinds due to the DPRK's strict Covid-19 restrictions, we still find ourselves in the midst of a dense fog of uncertainty. Yet, we give thanks for God's presence and faithfulness. Like the sun that we know is above and beyond the fog, but whose penetrating light we cannot yet see, we rest in the steadfast assurance of His abiding presence and everlasting love.

Your faithful prayers and partnership, especially throughout this continuing season of extreme challenges, light the grey murkiness of the path ahead like searching headlights as we cautiously creep forward. You continue to encourage and strengthen us greatly as we walk by faith and not by sight – trusting that the sun will yet break through, and the ministry of CFK will continue in the timing and grace of our Lord.

PROGRAM UPDATE

As of this writing, the North Korean border remains closed to nearly all humanitarian shipments and travel, although there appears to be a limited relaxation currently in process as multiple UNICEF and WHO humanitarian shipments that have been waiting at the Chinese border for many months are expected to soon be offloaded at Nampo, DPRK. We have been guardedly hopeful that this might mark the beginning of a wider opening for humanitarian re-engagement. So far, however, rumors of possible reopening have not materialized into concrete developments.

While it is impossible to confirm actual conditions on the ground inside North Korea at this time, certainly 2021 has brought much greater hardship for many ordinary people inside DPRK (over 40% of whom were malnourished as of 2019). Since our last update, an early end to the rainy season gave way to damaging high heat affecting North Korea for several weeks during the peak of the growing season. This was broken by heavy rains in August that caused significant flooding along the East coast, and later in the Northwest.

Remote satellite imagery and sensing analysis of 2021 crops growing in the fields reported on by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on October 4, 2021 noted, “While not yet a crisis of famine proportions, the negative trend combined with external factors such as low yields in the previous year and flood damage to the northeastern croplands and crop transport infrastructure, aggravate the food insecurity in the country.” In July, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimated North Korea would be short 2-3 months of food for 2021 (860,000 metric tons). Yet, borders remain closed to humanitarian assistance due to Covid measures. Meanwhile, various news sources have continued to report on shortages and stockouts of critical medicine and medical supplies, rampant inflation and other internal challenges.

We are grateful to report that we received approval for renewed US Treasury and Commerce Licenses, and also for a UN 1718 Sanctions Committee Exemption, all necessary for us to legally continue engagement and humanitarian work with the DPRK whenever borders reopen.

COVID REVERSES HARD FOUGHT GAINS IN TB CONTROL

In October, the Global Tuberculosis Report 2021 was released, compiling data on disease trends in over 200 countries and the response to the TB epidemic. A press release by the Stop TB Partnership noted, “According to the report, (global) tuberculosis deaths in 2020 have increased for the first time in over a decade...an upward trend that is expected to worsen in 2021. We now see more than 4,100 people dying from TB every single day. The Covid-19 pandemic combined with low political will and appallingly low levels of funding have reversed hard-fought gains in the fight against this age-old disease.”

According to the report, DPRK remains one of the 30 “High TB Burden” and “High Multi Drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB) Burden” countries, and ranks 5th in the world in terms of TB incidence. The DPRK’s “total TB incidence best estimate” was reported at 513:100,000 population for 2019. With the border closure in place since January 2020 – and only now showing limited occasional signs of reopening - existing TB and MDR-TB medicine stocks were expected to have run out sometime in late 2020, leaving no medicine available to treat an estimated 115,000 -150,000 patients that should have been diagnosed and started on treatment in 2021.

As long as patients are untreated, they remain contagious to others (especially those closest to them), and their disease becomes more difficult to treat. Of further concern, the TB report graphs the number of TB cases in each high burden country attributable to each of five primary risk factors: Alcohol, Diabetes, HIV infection, Smoking, and Undernourishment. In DPRK, an estimated 60,000-80,000 cases in 2019 were attributed to undernourishment. The remaining cases in DPRK were mostly attributed to smoking and alcohol.

In the context of what is likely now an acute and steadily worsening nutritional situation for the general population due to the accumulated severe economic impacts of Covid border closures, poor harvests in 2020 and 2021, rampant inflation, and significant flood damage, there is grave cause for concern about further rapid expansion of epidemic TB and MDR TB in DPRK. Please continue to pray that circumstances can change soon such that lifesaving humanitarian engagement can resume. Resources to guide prayer can be found at: www.cfk.org/21prayerfast



TB patients at Kumchon TB Rest Home.

STORIES OF ENGAGEMENT - OUR VOICES

Engagement always involves at least two parties – us, and them. Usually, we are privileged to share in these pages some of what we hear from our North Korean counterparts during our visits to the country. But now, in this time of waiting, we wanted to share how engagement with the DPRK since 1995 has impacted our lives and perspectives. What follows are a few of the 219 voices representing 10 countries who have made 86 visits with CFK to the DPRK spending over 1,099 days (just over three years, cumulatively) in the country collectively. These visits impact and change each participant in profound and meaningful ways. We hope you are encouraged by their reflections.



David Won Kim with DPRK officials in front of Changyon TB Rest Home.

DAVID WON KIM, Technical Volunteer, Brisbane, Australia: I've visited DPRK a few times, mainly assisting on water projects during the visits. It gave me many opportunities to work with local volunteers. So my reflection is a particular conversation I had with a local official.

While I was laying pipes in the ditches, a local authority approached me and asked, "Comrade Kim, how much do you get paid when you get back home?" I replied, "We don't get paid. We are here as volunteers building solar powered water systems here. We even paid all our expenses to come here."

With narrowed eyes, he said, "Other organizations usually pay their workers here, so you must get paid after this. Comrade Kim, you can tell me how much you would receive." I smiled at him, "Aha, of course we get paid, but not with money. We get paid with something else." He moved closer and said, "With what?" I answered, "We get paid with local dishes prepared by the staff here. We get paid with the smiles on the patient's faces. The biggest paycheck I get is the yearning in my heart that brings me back here to see you."

While I am sure that he understood what I explained, it seemed he didn't want to admit it, so he said, "I don't believe what you said, but thank you for helping us. I heard you already came here twice in the past, and you are here again. I didn't want to come here (to this rest home) because of the long distance and uncomfortable trip from my office. But you've come here three times. I am so impressed." Later we talked about our families, and how to parent teenaged children. I've been praying for him and his family, and I hope to see him again.

DAVID SYREN, Renovation & Water Team Volunteer, Anchorage, Alaska: There are many things on my heart to express about North Korea, the work there, and the people involved. I treasure the many friends I have met and worked with in North Korea over several decades now. I'm humbled by their diligent perseverance in profoundly difficult circumstances and I'm hoping to greet them in eternity because they believed in and embraced Truth.

The opportunity to partner with CFK in North Korea has been a most rewarding experience, though not without sacrifice and hard work. Can an ocean of suffering realize a spreading ripple from a splash of compassion and love? CFK aims to answer this question by caring for the hurting people of North Korea. It has been an honor to join CFK in "rocking the boat" and rippling the water to help the hurting in North Korea with tangible gifts of compassion and love.

Like the woman at the well (John 4:4-26) seeking good water, not knowing it was spiritual water she needed most, I trust those doing the same thing in North Korea will somehow find the Living Water they need most, for all of eternity, and then return to their villages to share with the others. Towards this end, I labor there.



David Syren, working with locals to install a water line.

ALICE U. LEE, Physician, HOPE for Hepatitis Project, Sydney, Australia:

The phrase that always pulled a string to my heart was the earnest way they said goodbye at each visit. It always ended with, “We will be waiting for you.” On the occasion when we were delayed, they were so clearly worried that we had not returned as promised. “What happened...?” the patients would ask. I cannot begin to imagine what is going on now...wondering about what happened...waiting...waiting.

Having been a physician for over two decades, I thought that I had a good sense of what it meant to be a good doctor. I had so much to learn. Local physicians in North Korea would ride their bikes in the cold over long distances so that their charges did not miss out as they remained ill at home and unable to attend clinic. The connections between doctors and patients were much more than I had seen anywhere else. The doctors advocated for the patients, they voiced their worries, and they shouted loudly for what they needed, making sure that we heard.

There is a very special sense of belonging that I feel when I am in Korea - returning to my people and to my home from long ago. In some ways, there is a sense of completeness. I am humbled and honored to be able to partake in such a journey, inspired by those around me.



Dr. Alice Lee with a patient during a HOPE clinic.

GIVING THANKS FOR YOU

Thank you for your faithful prayers and partnership with us, and with the North Korean people through these extraordinary times. Please join us in faithful prayer as we wait with hope in the words of Lamentations 3:21-26.

“Yet this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, the Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him. The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

PRAYER POINTS

- Please pray for early resumption of diagnostics and care for hepatitis, tuberculosis and multi-drug resistant tuberculosis patients. Please pray for protection and wisdom for the staff of care centers trying to care for patients, and for real hope.
- Please pray that a wise, effective and full measured response to Covid can be assembled for North Korea such that borders can reopen allowing the resumption of effective humanitarian engagement. Pray for provision for the most needy among the society, and for hope.
- As Jesus taught in Mark 4:26-28 *“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel...”* Give thanks that even when we aren’t able to be there, God has promised that the seed we have planted in North Korea will continue to grow; pray for an abundant harvest.



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