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THE FOURTH RIVER PROJECT REPORT -- December, 2003

www.thefourthriver.org

Preparing for the opening of North Korea

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Dear Friends,

God is good! My most recent trip to Korea was a great encouragement. While not quite as exhilarating as the July trip, it felt like we were really getting work done.

The Three Seas Center

The preliminary engineering work for the Three Seas Training Center continues forward on schedule. As many of you know, this work must be completed and approved by several levels of government before we can negotiate the actual purchase of the land that Jesus Abbey is now leasing. The government will not release the land for private use until it is assured that its overall goals for the region will be furthered and that environmental concerns are also addressed. We expect the engineering work to be done shortly. This includes the preparation of books filled with specifications, maps, plans and diagrams that are several inches thick! If we stay on track, we expect to get the permits in February or March and then begin the process of negotiating the purchase. We are told that it will take about five months for this process to be completed. That means, we can expect to actually own the land by the end of August. Please pray that we will be able to keep this process going and that it will be completed on schedule--if not before!

Once we own the land, we will launch a major fund-raising effort in Korea to secure the funding needed to build the center over the next two years or so. We are blessed with the participation of an excellent consulting company that specializes in helping non-profit organizations establish solid financial foundations. We have already been following their advice and have found it most helpful.

Working Group

During this trip, it became very clear to us that it is time to establish a committee of people that I am calling, for the present, our "Working Group" in Korea. This group is not a board of directors or trustees but it may eventually become that. At the moment, all our efforts in Korea are under the auspices of Jesus Abbey. It is the Abbey that is the party making applications for the permits, etc. I have been appointed to my position by the Jesus Abbey leadership. The Abbey's intent is to spin the Three Seas Center off as an independent sister organization once the construction is complete. At that time, we will create a new non-profit organization with its own board of trustees. The new organization will then maintain a close and continuous working relationship with the Abbey.

However, we cannot wait until then to have a group of people outside of the Abbey working with us providing guidance, support, wisdom, expertise, and so forth. So, for now we are creating the Working Group. We may come up with a different name in the near future. In light of this need, Brother John Choi, manager of the Jesus Abbey Grange where the center will be built and my main partner on this project, joined me in speaking with a number of people about serving with us. John continues to follow up with those that we met as well as others about serving in this group. Our plan is to convene the new group in March when I make my next trip to Korea. We are very grateful to the people who have served in the past as a committee of supporters. Some of these individuals will serve in the new Working Group and others will pass the baton on to a younger generation. John and I were most encouraged by the enthusiastic and supportive reception that we continued to have, especially as we discussed the Working Group. We are delighted to report that Dr. Kim Young-Gil, President of Handong Global University in Pohang (<http://www.han.ac.kr/>) has agreed to serve as a member of the group. We consider him to be one of its anchors. I am especially excited about the possibility of an ongoing collaboration between Handong and the Fourth River Project in the area of North Korean research. They are heavily involved in projects in North Korea and have a North Korea field research institute.

As we finalize who is in the group and the capacities in which they will serve, you will be hearing more.

Good Meetings

As I have already mentioned, this trip included a number of good meetings with people to whom we introduced the vision for the opening of North Korea including some that we met for the first time and others who were old friends.

John and I were especially honored to meet the Korean Ambassador for Human Rights, Dr. Park Kyung Seo (<http://www.humanrights.go.kr/eng/about/greeting/GrComGre.jsp>). Before his appointment as ambassador, he spent several years overseeing humanitarian aid to North Korea as Asia Secretary for the World Council of Churches. He was quite enthusiastic about the Fourth River Project and promised to consider how he might assist us. I am looking forward to gleaning from his insights and experience.

We also had the pleasure of sharing our vision with Bishop Simon Kim (retired) now president of the Sungkonghoe University (<http://www.skhu.ac.kr/eng/index.html>) in Seoul. I have known Bishop Kim since my childhood when he was one of my father's first seminarians at St. Michael's Anglican Seminary predecessor to the University. He also encouraged us but had some sobering comments about the difficulty of the task that we have set ourselves to. (Dr. Park Kyung Seo is also on the faculty of the University.)

We had the opportunity of sharing on a Sunday with the Ta-II Church in Seoul and the Daeduk Hanbit Presbyterian Church in Taejon. The Ta-II Church is well known in Korea for their intentional community and their ministry to street people in the area around Chongyangni Station in the eastern part of Seoul. The Daeduk Hanbit Church is also very interesting because of the large number of scientists and engineers who attend from the Korea Advanced Institute of Technology (KAIST) and companies related to the Institute. Both congregations and their clergy were very supportive of our vision for North Korea as was the new pastor of the Love Church (Sarang Kyo-whae), the Rev. Oh Jung-hyun whom we also got to meet. Pastor Oh came there just recently after a number of years pastoring in the US, including establishing the Love Korean Church in Los Angeles.

I was invited to attend a seminar on North Korean refugees sponsored by the Kookmin Daily News. While there I met Dr. Yim Kyung-Ho, Dean of the Good People College (www.goodpeople.or.kr). This school, started under the auspices of the Central Full Gospel Church (<http://english.fgtv.com/>) focuses on working with refugees and training them for productive lives in the South. Dr. Yim, pledged his support for our work.

The list of such meetings is really too long to include everyone but each one was a special blessing for us in some way. I continually thank the Lord for the way that he directs us to the right people.

Website Updates

We have just finished updating material on our website, www.thefourthriver.org, with Korean translations of the Strategy document and the Research Topics. I have also added to the list of potential research topics as new things come to mind through conversations and reflection. As stated in that document, this is not an exhaustive list of all that we need to study in preparation for the opening of North Korea. At best, it is a partial list meant to get people thinking and to encourage people to take on a research project. In addition to the updates, I am excited to be able to post a chapter from a book written in 1909 that contains first-hand accounts of the great revival that broke out in Wonsan, North Korea in 1903 and hit Pyongyang in 1907. I encourage everyone to read this riveting account and prayerfully consider why God would allow such a promising beginning result in a nation so dark and oppressed. We need to understand this history well. The book is Korea in Transition by James S. Gale. The chapter is available for downloading and printing on the Library page of our website.

A comment on the Fourth River Strategy (draft version). I want to draw your attention to this document, also on the Library page. It contains my thinking on how we are to pursue this process of preparing for the opening of North Korea through research and training and the importance of the Three Seas Center in preparing teams of people ready to share the Gospel and God's love in North Korea. I want your thoughts on this strategy. Please read it over and post your thoughts in the website's Forum or send them to me directly.

Research Collaboration

Shortly before this last trip to Korea, I attended the premier of *Complete Obedience: The Legacy of Dr. R.A. Torrey* (see www.jesusabbey.tv) at Biola University (www.biola.edu). While there, I met with Dr. Doug Pennoyer, Dean of the School of Intercultural Studies and Dr. Judy Ligenfelter, Director of the PhD program, both of whom were very interested in my emphasis on the need to do research on North Korea. I am excited about the possibilities.

I also met with Pastor "NK" Dave, director of the World Center for North Korea Missions (www.nkmissions.org). We had a blessed time together sharing, planning and praying. We decided to work together to develop a strong research collaboration involving other organizations on a more formal basis. We are still working this idea through and will share the details as it develops. I am sure it will include institutions such as Biola and Handong as well as other schools. I shared our ideas with the Rev. Greg Parsons, General Director of the US Center for World Missions in Pasadena (www.uscwm.org). He pledged the support of the US Center as we move forward.

January Trip

At the moment, I am planning a trip back to the Los Angeles area to share with churches in the area, explore the research collaboration idea further and meet with people concerned about North Korea. These plans are still in the works. If you would like me to share at your church or are interested in participating in a general meeting, let me know right away.

A Personal Note

Along with everything else that is going on, we have just moved! We moved out of our old house in South Windsor, CT a couple of days before our trip to Biola and then moved into our new one here in Ellington, CT the day after returning and three days before I left for Korea! Nothing like scheduling everything in a sensible manner... The Lord's schedule is not always ours and this one was rather hectic. Needless to say, we are still moving in and sorting out (which is one reason I haven't sent this letter out sooner). Our new address is 39 Chestnut St., Ellington, CT 06029.

Keep Praying!

As always, I seek your prayers for the Fourth River Project, the work on the Three Seas Center, the need for researchers, the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ as we prepare to share His love to North Korea, that God hasten the day when the North will be open and we will be prepared. My wife, Liz and I could also use your prayers as we continue to organize our new, much smaller home.

Thank you!

Yours, in Him,
Ben Torrey