



CHRISTIAN FRIENDS OF KOREA

조선의 그리스도인 벗들

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I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.

Psalms 77: 11,13-14



CFK Team Allowed to Return to DPRK to Continue Humanitarian Engagement

Despite the initiation of a travel ban on American citizens that took effect on September 1, 2017, a Christian Friends of Korea team received special permission and humanitarian passports from the US government and DPRK visa approval allowing for our return to DPRK from October 17 – Nov 4, 2017. A CFK team including 10 Americans, 2 Australians and 1 dual Russian/US citizen made our fourth and last planned visit for 2017. We were greeted at the airport by familiar immigration and customs officials, and warmly welcomed by our local colleagues. We were grateful to have a very productive and largely uneventful visit despite extreme tensions in the region.

The purpose of the visit was to confirm the arrival and distribution of multiple shipments of relief goods sent since our last confirming visit in March 2017, to continue ongoing technical assistance at the National TB Reference Lab, to enhance or complete several water system installations at care centers, and to expand treatment for hepatitis B patients.

During the visit, we travelled more than 4500 km to visit 22 care centers in rural and urban areas, checking on the arrival and distribution of food, blankets, hygiene kits, greenhouse plastic, water filter buckets and other relief goods. Despite the extreme tensions, we were very warmly received, and on the whole it was a very 'normal'

visit. We were able to share the donor list at each and every place, reminding care center staff of the thousands of people praying for them, who value their challenging work among the sick, and who continue to support these efforts in many ways. We were shown warm hospitality and were asked to convey to you, our donors, sincere thanks and gratitude for all that is being done through CFK to help patients in many places.



CFK interpreter Warren Johnston visits with greenhouse staff at Paechon TB Rest Home.

Tensions Create Challenges

The Fall has been filled with many additional challenges related to our ongoing work, yet, we are grateful that God continues to provide a way for it to continue. The travel ban on American citizens took effect on September 1, so we had to apply for special single-use passports allowing US citizens to visit DPRK for humanitarian purposes - a process that we will need to repeat with each and every future visit. We were granted letters of approval in response to our application, which then had to be processed into special single-use passports, and this process resulted in us receiving these passports just a couple of days prior to our planned departure. The uncertainty of the process and timing of the return of our passports forced us to cut three days from the front of our visit.

Further, new sanctions announced later in September required us to suspend all our shipments and purchases while we sought out external counsel and underwent a full legal review and reassessment of the remaining space for humanitarian engagement. With help from pro bono counsel, we were able to verify that our existing BIS (Commerce) export licenses are still valid, allowing us to resume shipping of humanitarian goods in containers from the US to the DPRK. All of this

required considerable research, phone calls, discussions and paperwork, adding significant burden to our normal workload. We are now in the process of preparing an application for a special U.S. Treasury license to cover the purchase of goods bought in third countries, and are praying that it can be processed and approved quickly.

Our travels inside DPRK took us to many remote locations – including Changyon, Tosan, Kumchon, Unryul, and Sinwon to name a few. Each place has its own character, history, and challenges, but it was encouraging to learn about the importance of protein and other food support, the continued productivity of CFK-supplied greenhouses, the value and impact of clean water on patient lives, and the efforts being made to improve each and every care center. We carried with us this time for delivery to each place replacement plastic for greenhouses, spinach seed, and tractor parts so that fresh food can continue to be grown in greenhouses when it is most needed – during the cold winter months.

Water Projects and Filter Buckets

Besides our confirming visits to 22 care centers, Rob Robinson was able to confirm the depth of a new well drilled since August at the Pyongyang #3 TB Hospital – Pediatric Ward, and install a pump into the well, completing this system for the 24 staff caring for about 150 children who spend months in recovery here at this care center. At the Kaesong TB Hospital he was also able to install a higher capacity pump and additional solar panels into the well,



increasing the water supply available for this facility that treats hundreds of in-patients and nearly 1500 outpatients

Top: CFK confirming team visiting Shinwon TB Rest Home. Below Left: Rob Robinson works on electrical wiring of solar panles. Below Right: A North Korean patient receives a water filter bucket to take home.



every year. Smaller repairs were made to several other care centers, and we continue to receive reports of how valuable these water systems are to the patients. The health of a significant number of patients has been greatly improved by the clean water now available at most CFK supported care centers, and we are trying to extend the provision of clean water to individual households through a new initiative that is sending water filter buckets home with patients who suffer from chronic diarrhea / GI problems. These water filter buckets will provide up to 10 years of clean water for families and require only minimal routine cleaning of the filters. Many have been in use for several years already with great success and impact.

National TB Reference Lab Assistance Continues

Meanwhile, Dr. Ed Desmond continued technical training at the National TB Reference Lab. While supply chain issues continue to present significant challenges to the smooth operation of this lab, we are grateful for the learning and technical progress made as a result of long term training efforts, and are hopeful that core issues can be resolved. This lab is critical to efforts to control the TB epidemic in the DPRK, so we must retain our resolve despite the entrenched challenges, especially within a context of heightened sanctions.

Blood Draws, Training and Preparation for Hepatitis Clinics

In the middle of our travels to the rural areas, we took time out for several days of blood draw clinics in Pyongyang and Kaesong so that diagnostic tests (hematology, chemistry, immunology) could be run on blood samples from hepatitis B



Patients are being checked in at Kaesong hepatitis clinic.

patients in advance of the treatment clinics planned for the last week of the visit. Whenever we do clinics, it requires advance preparations, including generating patient lists, receiving patients/checking ID's, blood sample collection, marking of blood tubes, running the diagnostic tests, entering the results in our database, and then generating printed patient results for review by the physicians during clinic. It is a time consuming and laborious process, but also an opportunity to greet patients and provide the critical diagnostics required for good treatment decisions for both international and local physicians, all while maintaining the integrity and transparency of the program. Throughout our 19-day stay, Dr. Marcia Kilsby, our long-time volunteer clinical lab trainer from Global Care Partners, continued ongoing professional development of lab staff in both Pyongyang and Kaesong.

**In Her Own Words: Marcia A. Kilsby, PhD,
MLS(ASCP)cmSBB, CLS(NCA) CFK Volunteer**

For the last nine years (19 trips) I have had the honor of working to bring modern clinical diagnostics to the tuberculosis and hepatitis facilities supported by Christian Friends of Korea. Each trip finds me looking forward to working with my DPRK colleagues again and learning how well their laboratories and instruments have been functioning since we last saw each other. Because of the geopolitical situation, I felt for the first time a sense of disquiet regarding this trip. My husband, who has been immeasurably supportive of the work and all my extended absences, was not as comfortable with me going this time. I prayed for some indication that I should go and that very weekend a visiting pastor at our home church preached a sermon with a most unusual illustration about responding to the voice of God, stepping out in faith, and using one's talents for the Lord. What an affirmation!

Preparations were finalized. The order for the reagents and laboratory supplies needed for hepatitis clinical diagnostic tests that we usually purchase from our wonderfully helpful Chinese supplier was completed. The special one-time passport issued by the U.S. government was in hand. Everything was ready.

Then I learned from Heidi Linton two days before departure that we had to cancel the laboratory supply order until we could apply for and receive a special license to source and send humanitarian goods from other countries to DPRK. I was heartsick. Although we had carefully set aside some lab supplies earlier in the Spring just in case we had trouble getting a complete order filled later in the year, I was extremely worried that we would not have enough to care for all the hepatitis patients that would come to the clinics. How dreadful it would be to have to say to a sick person, "I am sorry we do not have a needle or collection tube to take your blood specimen" or "we have run out of reagents so we cannot test your sample." I was praying for a laboratory version of the Lord's blessing of the widow and the oil (2 Kings 4: 1-7) - and He answered our prayers. We had enough of everything we needed to test over 600 patients AND leave some reagents and supplies behind for our DPRK colleagues to use throughout the winter months until our return next spring. How good is our God!!



Dr. Marcia Kilsby bathed in light streaming from the lab.

Both the Kaesong and Pyongyang Hepatitis Hospitals' multi-room, solar-powered laboratories, each built within the last two years by CFK volunteer teams under the direction of Rob Robinson, CFK Board Chair and foreman par excellence, are operating well. We have experienced no power shortages for the instruments or laboratory lighting. How amazing to walk out of either facility after dusk and see



Dr. Marcia Kilsby and her lab team in Kaesong.

that the only lights on were in the laboratory.

Although a beautiful, wonderfully built facility and modern instrumentation helps toward providing quality laboratory diagnostics, the core necessity is dedicated, well-trained laboratory professionals. Because many of the automated and semi-automated instruments and procedures required for Hepatitis B assessment and treatment were new to the laboratory personnel, much learning had to take place in a very short time. Racks with dozens of blood collection tubes would arrive in the laboratory and each laboratory member would efficiently take care of his/her area of testing responsibility without drama or confusion. Think of trying to accurately dispense approximately 1/10 of a drop of water to an accuracy of +0.0001 for 450 chemistry tests in a single day. That is the skill level required. Each staff member is quickly reaching proficiency. We are able to report laboratory results in clinical chemistry, hematology,

and immunology that the doctors can have confidence are accurate and dependable. Nearly 8,000 chemistry, hematology, and immunology tests were completed in five days.

The staff at both facilities demonstrated their professionalism and growing competence through long days and a high volume of tests without faltering.



Laboratory staff is quickly reaching proficiency with testing.

For years, my teaching and mentoring goal has been to build capacity for the laboratories to provide dependable, quality laboratory diagnostics. They are well on their way.

Travels and Discoveries

During our time in country, we witnessed in our considerable travels the completion and gathering of the rice harvest, clearing of the corn fields and plowing in preparation for winter, and the initial harvest of the radish and cabbage crops in preparation for kimchee-making. This is an extremely busy time of year with many people spending long days in the fields cutting, gathering, stacking, transporting, threshing, sacking, and loading rice, corn and other crops. Large open areas and roadsides were filled with bright patches of yellow, gold and red as corn, rice or red peppers dried in the late fall sunshine and open air. Low rise apartment balconies and single family dwellings sported bright yellow corn cobs woven into columns and hung beside long strings of red peppers drying from the rafters. Persimmons dangled like glowing orange ornaments from leafless trees, and golden ginkgo leaves fluttered against bright blue fall skies, and paved the streets with their transient glory. The roads were filled with tractors and trailers, ox carts, hand carts, bicycles, and people with A-frame packs loaded high with everything from corn stalks to rice straw, kimchee-pots to water jugs, and many other bagged goods.

There were a number of encouraging discoveries during our nearly three weeks in country – rutabaga and spinach seed provided by our Norwegian colleagues (Evangelisk Orientmisjon) produced good crops in many places, along with beet, tomato and other seeds provided through CFK's partner, Seed Programs International. Shinwon TB



A rutabaga growing at Changyon TB Rest Home.

Rest home – following our team's completion of a water system there earlier this spring - has nearly completed the shell of a new patient ward, and many other care centers continue to upgrade their facilities to improve in-patient care. S. Hwanghae Hepatitis Hospital, after the water system was successfully installed in August, has worked hard to tear out floors, ceilings and doorways from a building that will be fully renovated and made into a new solar-powered clinical laboratory for this province, planned for next year.

We were saddened and pained to learn that one of our long-time directors was severely injured in July after falling two stories from a new building under construction at his facility, breaking vertebrae in his back. At the time of our visit he was still clearly in pain from the injury that he expected would take at least six months to fully heal. New construction or renovation work is usually done by the local



Rice bundles gathered and ready for threshing at Sohung TB Rest Home.

doctors, nurses, and staff, adding hard labor to their regular tasks of caring for patients under difficult circumstances. We were also saddened to learn that 31 patients started on treatment have died since the start of the Hepatitis B program, including one 18-year-old boy who was very sick when he visited our clinic in late August. Deaths are not unexpected as many of the patients we are trying to help are in the last stages of their disease, but still, we remember our interactions with these patients, and we grieve their loss – especially the tragic loss of one so young. This disease causes such suffering in so many families – the ripples go deep and wide.

HOPE Project Work Continues

Dr. Marcia Kilsby continued technical assistance at the Pyongyang and Kaesong Hepatitis Hospital labs, working side by side with local staff to process hundreds of blood samples and complete nearly 8,000 tests while improving local capacity for accurate diagnostics and treatment of hepatitis patients. And meanwhile, Terry Smith entered new patient photos, diagnostic results and patient data into our databases so that patient treatment records could be generated and printed in time for the clinical team's arrival. This is some of the unsung, behind-the-scenes but vitally necessary work that makes this program possible.

During the hepatitis B clinical team's visits, our four medical doctors (David Hilmers, Christine Jun, Alice Lee, and Sissel Topple) supported by Melissa Kermeen (nurse), Warren



Terry Smith and Melissa Kermeen work the patient registration desk.

Johnston (interpreter), Terry Smith and myself, working alongside our North Korean counterparts saw 172 patients in Kaesong over 2 days, and 420 patients in Pyongyang over 3 days. 134 patients were started on treatment (for the first



David Hilmer, (Back Row). Middle L - R: Christine Jun, Sissel Topple, Alice Lee, Heidi Linton, Terry Smith. Front Row: Melissa Kermeen.

time) and 6 or 12 month follow up exams were done on nearly 500 patients. Many patients are seeing significant improvement in their health and

well-being as a result of antiviral therapy. This was visibly apparent in the faces of patients with many showing marked improvement in their color, weight and overall health after being on treatment for several months. We are now caring for several TB doctors who have hepatitis (and who we have known for many years through their TB work) and one of them remarked with a big smile, *“After taking the medicine for 40 days, I suddenly felt better and my appetite returned! I am continuing to gain strength since I am able to eat better.”* What a blessing to be able to positively intervene in the lives of so many patients. While patients waited to see the doctors they were able to read more about hepatitis and treatment through a patient information handbook developed by our team. Training of the staff also took place in both places.

In our morning devotional time, we spent time in the Psalms, and later focused our study on the work and person of the Holy Spirit. This time together helps to refocus and center us, giving wisdom and perspective and equipping us for the challenges of each day as we join together in worship, study and prayer. We were the only foreign guests this time at Chilgol Church and were warmly welcomed on both Sundays (*“We love Christian Friends of Korea!”*) despite the pastors’ sermons that included references to the current challenging political situation. We were invited to address the congregation, and spoke briefly about our purpose this time, including reminding them of your love and prayers. Traffic in Pyongyang was a little lighter than usual, presumably owing to the high fuel prices during the time of our visit. We also saw a variety of pro-nuclear (and anti-American posters), including some at the care centers where we are working.



The morning commute near Kaesong

In His Own Words: Jonathan Clemens, MD Representative of Mennonite Central Committee CFK Volunteer

You say, *“I choose the appointed time, it is I who judge with equity. When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm. Psalm 75:2-3*

Many of the morning devotionals that we shared during our recent visit to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) were from the Psalms. I found much inspiration and comfort in these readings and in the knowledge that God is sovereign. By being in DPRK and pondering the Psalms in this context, the words gained new strength and meaning in ways that were significant to me.



During late October, I had the privilege of traveling with a CFK group for 12 days. I accompanied them as a representative of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), which has been partnering with CFK for 10 years. MCC is a major relief, development and peace agency of Mennonite and Mennonite-related churches in the US and Canada.

My own career has been, since 1995, as a pediatrician in an urban teaching practice in Baltimore, Maryland. Ever since my wife, Ruth, and I served with MCC in Cambodia from 1988-1993, I have felt drawn toward people and nations that have been politically and economically isolated, much as Cambodia was during the first three years of our service there. For this reason I have held the DPRK in my prayers in a special way over the years. When this opportunity to visit was offered, I said yes.

I felt privileged to be a part of this visit on several levels:

- I was able to meet and develop friendships with many dedicated people who are working to provide services to treat TB and Hepatitis B, both Koreans and CFK workers.
- I visited about 20 hospitals and rest homes where MCC assistance has been utilized and I gained an appreciation of the genuine friendships and working partnerships that have taken root over the years.
- I conveyed greetings and prayers directly from Mennonite churches in the US and Canada to many of the CFK partners. I spoke with hospital directors about the people and churches that provide relief supplies to them through CFK.

- I was able, with the help of Heidi and Rob, to discern how the CFK and MCC relationship can continue to thrive.
- I learned that my services would be useful in the Hepatitis B treatment clinics.
- I gained a better understanding of some of the nuances and realities in the DPRK, adding a necessary depth to the often one dimensional news headlines.
- I saw God working in many ways and in many hearts

Plans for 2018

As we look ahead to the coming year, the picture is clouded with considerable uncertainty amidst the extreme tensions in the region, intense sanctions pressure that is affecting transactions necessary for the delivery of humanitarian aid (shipping, purchasing, banking, China customs clearance, etc.), and licensing uncertainty. Regardless, there is much work to be done and we are working hard to find the necessary paths. Many care centers have asked for help with windows, doors, ceiling materials and tile so they can complete necessary renovations of patient care buildings. Some places need more greenhouses so they can grow more food onsite. We need to send a new passenger/cargo vehicle to support our work teams in country, and we need to send ambulances (x4) to replace those sent in 2006, and which are now almost completely worn out after long years of intense use on very rough roads. We have been asked to pilot better sanitation facilities at care centers and we hope to develop a plan for this in 2018. We hope to start and complete renovation work at the S Hwanghae #2 Hepatitis Hospital laboratory in 2018 so that hepatitis B treatment can be expanded beyond the two pilot sites of Pyongyang and Kaesong, thereby opening a treatment path for the 2.5 million people of S Hwanghae Province. And we have been asked to consider transitioning our support from 11 care centers where we have already done considerable work over many years, to similar care centers in new locations. Furthermore, as part of our hepatitis B screening process, we are picking up cases

of hepatitis C, and we would like to bring in additional diagnostic capacity and curative medicine to provide treatment for these patients. Finally, several more care centers are waiting for solar-powered gravity fed water systems to be installed.



CFK director, Heidi Linton is warmly greeted by a rest home director.

In order for any of this work to be possible, we need approval from the US Treasury Department (OFAC) to purchase humanitarian goods in third countries (China, India, etc.) for delivery to DPRK, banking approval to make and receive necessary wire transfers, suppliers willing to sell to us, Chinese customs agents willing to approve clearance for humanitarian goods, and the necessary administrative and funding support. Until we can resume purchases in China and elsewhere, we face significantly higher costs for the materials needed to keep our programs going. Please pray with us that God will make a way for His purposes to be accomplished in His way and timing, for the glory of His name. Despite the extreme situation we continue to see His hand of provision, and we praise Him for it.

Please continue to pray over these issues, and partner with us financially as you can. Now more than ever before, we need your faithful prayers and generosity as we strive to meet many needs within a context of extreme challenges. Our help continues to make a very practical and life-giving difference in the lives of thousands of patients and the staff caring for them every year. In the midst of all the tensions, our persistent engagement and presence brings comfort, reassurance and encouragement to staff and patients alike. As one staff member put it, ***"we will be waiting for your return in March."*** Thank you for your faithful prayers and partnership that will help make this possible.



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