

Christian Friends of Korea

June 2009

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

CFK Visits North Korea May 23-June 4, 2009

While North Korea continued to dominate international news headlines following their second nuclear test, the launching of ballistic missiles, and heightened international tensions, a CFK team made extraordinary progress on multiple ongoing projects during a visit to DPRK from May 23 – June 4.

The warmth, flexibility and level of partnership experienced within the country could not have been in starker contrast to what we learned was



going on simultaneously outside the country (through watching CNN – the only international news source we were able to access during our stay). It is a testimony to the power of the love of God and the patient work and contributions of many to relationship-building efforts and trust.

During our 12-day visit, we logged over 1500 kilometers, visiting 12 TB rest homes (including 3 newly assigned ones) and 6 hospitals. We also completed final technical assessments including building plans for housing an oxygen generator and bottling



equipment (needed for surgery), and renovation plans for a major and strategic laboratory project with which we are fully engaged this year. We attended both the Chilgol Church and the Catholic Church. We also were able to have meetings with WHO representatives, as well as with North Korean officials who visited us in North Carolina in March and who supervised the recently-ended USNGO food delivery program.

The high levels of trust and understanding between our sides continue to enable the successful completion of major improvement projects that were beyond the realm of possibility just a few short years ago.

Fourth Operating Suite Renovation Completed

On this visit, we rejoiced in the completion of the fourth operating suite renovation project that was begun last October by our technical team at the Kaesong Provincial TB Hospital. It is truly an amazing transformation of the physical space and operating capability, and

has reduced the post operative need for antibiotics by over 50%. We noted with joy and gratitude the quiet pride evident



on the faces of the director, local staff members, and city officials who all worked hard to fully complete the project. What a privilege to have the opportunity to come alongside them as brothers and sisters in the love of Christ to help make such lasting change possible.

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When we asked the director how the work went after we left in October, he replied, *"It was fun, and a joy for all of us! The impact of the renovation is that patients feel better than in previous years because we are equipped with more convenient and safe facilities."*

Later, when we visited our other supported hospitals, two other hospital directors who also renovated their OR's with CFK's help last year commented further, *"Thank you for the opportunity to do lots of operations. We are proud. Of all the people who have helped us, you have been the most helpful."*

And, at another hospital, *"We have received certifications from the government for all our new equipment (framed and hung proudly on the wall). The director at a nearby hospital heard about our OR renovation project and came to see for himself how wonderful it is. He noticed how clean and beautiful it now is and has asked to do surgeries for his patients here."*

Hwangju TB Rest Home Rebuilt through CFK Partnership

Another joyous visit was to the Hwangju TB Rest Home, where they were completing a major reconstruction of their patient care facilities. You may recall that they lost buildings in the flooding of 2007, and were anxious to not just replace basic structures, but provide a model for the rest of the country to promote



rest and healing for their patients. In May of last year, they presented us with architectural drawings and their dream for a better place. Here, just one year later, we could see the transformation in the facility already, even from a distance. As we drew near, the beaming faces of the director, the local staff and builders on site, still working on finishing touches, spoke of their joy and deep gratitude for our strong partnership with them in this effort. Through two special donations, we were able to provide roofing materials last July (before the rainy season set in) and other building materials last December that were needed to finish the project, including doors and windows, ceiling materials, tile, light fixtures, etc. Their real and deserved pride in what they were able to accomplish with a little help from people far away, who visit them regularly in the love and name of Christ, was deeply humbling and a very special gift. The director at

Hwangju said to us, *"Thank you for your support of this rest home. The staff here is very proud of the new facilities, and I am as well."*

They took us through the two new buildings (patient housing, and patient treatment/support), and we saw new patient rooms, treatment rooms, kitchen and dining areas, bathrooms (yet to be fully plumbed as they will need further help in drilling a new well), and



animal stalls including spaces filled with goats, pigs, rabbits, and chickens. After the tour, all ten of us were ushered into a cozy and beautifully

tiled new meeting room, along with our Ministry of Public Health colleagues, the hospital director and local officials for a delicious and bountiful lunch that they had prepared in our honor. Despite significant and continued food shortages that were evident throughout our travels, they were extremely hospitable, sharing fresh strawberries and tomatoes, cucumbers (from their greenhouse), kimchee, rice, soup with meat, fresh turkey, pheasant and duck eggs, peanuts, candy and other food. Never have we been hosted in a remote rest home as we were that day. It was rewarding for our whole team, including our MOPH colleagues, to share in their joy and accomplishment.

It is becoming more and more evident that the help that we are able to provide openly in the name of Christ, whether it be food, medicine, tractors, greenhouses,



blankets, doctor's kits, or building materials, while seemingly small in the face of all the overwhelming needs that we see on every visit – is, nonetheless, multiplied



in the hands of the Provider, and is making a significant difference in countless lives. More importantly, this help enables many other parallel changes and developments,

some of which are evident to us over time, others of which remain hidden, at least for now. Thank you for your prayers and partnership that allow these transformations to bring glory to God in North Korea.

Opportunities and Priorities

On this visit, we were invited to consider expanding our work into several significant and new areas and/or to introduce opportunities to new potential partners. We are humbled by the blessing of these opportunities and by the trust and invitation to deeper relationship implied in such requests; we are seeking wisdom and resources as we consider how best to respond.

Our priorities for the near term as outlined by our North Korean counterparts and observed throughout our travels are as follows:

“First priority is the National Lab, second priority is TB medicine, and third priority is nutritional food.”

1) Completion of the National TB Reference Lab renovation project: We need your urgent help to raise the additional \$140,000 needed immediately to finish this project. This lab is foundational to disease surveillance efforts and to equipping them to fully address growing drug resistance. Having this lab fully functional will greatly improve North Korea's ability to diagnose and treat TB, including multi-drug resistant TB, and will greatly enhance their ability to receive additional international funds and support for their TB eradication efforts, including first and second line drugs needed to treat patients. We are grateful to be working in close partnership with the Stanford School of Medicine /Bay Area TB



Consortium, Mercy Corps and International Aid to bring this lab to full operation.

2) First-line TB medicine: For the past eight years, the majority of first line TB medicines have been provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) through a variety of international program and emergency funding sources. We were advised in June that there are no funding mechanisms presently in place to provide any more TB medicine to North Korea. They currently have 91,000 registered cases, and that number is expected to continue to rise; their last shipment of TB medicine (just received) is expected to treat about 79,000 cases.



We were urged in the strongest possible terms by both WHO and the Ministry of Public Health to provide as much TB medicine as we could this year and next to help with the significant looming shortage. Consequently, we are working to raise funds for at least 12,000 patient kits of medicine within the next 12 months. This medicine translates directly into lives saved, while also preventing further disease spread. A full treatment kit of medicine, depending on disease severity, costs \$20-\$50/patient.

3) Nutritional food: Everywhere we went we heard that the food situation is *“about the same as last year.”* Last year was one of the most difficult years with respect to the food supply in recent years, and we heard then, from various directors, *“the food you send to us provides roughly 30% of our total food needs,” “40% of our food needs,” “50% of our food needs.”* In the words of another rest home director, *“the greatest challenge for me is the logistics of feeding the patients. The second greatest challenge is to treat the patients correctly and properly (for TB) to prevent multiple drug resistance.”* We have partners who are willing to donate container loads of nutritious food such as canned meat, vegetable soup mix and high-protein drinks to supplement what can be grown locally at each care facility; however, **we need to secure shipping funds in order to deliver them.**



It costs in the range of \$6,000 - \$8,000 to ship a 20' or 40' container, and we would like to send 6-8 containers each year in order to provide limited but vital food support to the health facilities we are assisting.

Multiple other priorities were also identified on this visit, including:

- the need for water well drilling at many of our supported facilities;
- walking tractors for several rest homes newly added to our portfolio;
- three-wheeled cargo tricycles to help local facilities move supplies and patients;
- a truck to help deliver our goods;
- replacement passenger vehicles to facilitate our travels and visits in country (ours have been heavily used on very rough roads for 8 years and are in need of replacement);
- roof replacements, doors and windows at multiple facilities;
- hospital beds and warm blankets;
- greenhouses;
- and many other smaller but no less important basic needs.



In addition to these is a new request for help within a completely new health treatment system. We are actively being invited to greatly expand our ongoing work on multiple levels, but this will require significant financial and other resources. Responding in even limited ways to the above needs would require \$1.2 million USD. We continue to weigh priorities against limited resources and are working very hard to raise awareness about the needs and unique opportunities opening to love and serve the people of North Korea through partnership efforts. Please pray that we will respond in wisdom and faith to these new opportunities, and please give as God enables you.

We strongly felt your prayer support during our recent visit, and are grateful for your strong prayer and financial partnership that makes these transformative efforts possible. We are beginning to see glimmers of real change brought about by the gentle, yet powerful persistence of the active love of Christ.

When I read the headlines, sometimes I get very discouraged and I wonder if we are just spinning our wheels, and if what we are doing is making any impact or not. And yet, every time we visit North Korea, we see God's hand at work in countless lives, in part through what we are doing. When you look into the eyes of a 43-year-old mother and TB patient who came in months ago on a stretcher, gaunt and very sick, and, after months of food, rest, and drug therapy, you see her sitting in front of you on her bed healthy and smiling, nearly ready to go back home to her children, and thankful for the help given by Christians...it is all worth it again. When you see a hospital administrator with tears in his eyes, deeply thankful for the transformation to his facility and the better care he is able to bring to his patients (whom he loves) as a result of the sincere and engaged help of Christians...it is all worth it again. When a humble farmer, tending a highly productive greenhouse at a rest home far out in the countryside, makes the effort to thank us in English for the help we have shared with them... it is all worth it again. We know that God is at work, and we pray for the faith and vision to keep walking despite the ill international winds that blow, often obscuring the clear but quiet signs of His engagement in many hearts and lives.



CFK Work is Featured in Alternative Gifts International Catalog

For the 10th consecutive year, the work of CFK is again being featured in the Alternative Gifts International (AGI) Catalog for 2009-2010 (see www.alternativegifts.org). The project to be featured this time will be our greenhouse project. AGI will be raising funds on our behalf from July 2009 - June 2010 through their alternative gift markets for the purposes of sending more greenhouses to North Korea, and the funds raised will be available to us in July 2010. This coming July, we expect to receive the proceeds of the present year's fundraising efforts which will be applied to hospital beds. Previous grants from AGI have helped to fund doctor's kits, bicycles, TB medicine, blankets, and other goods. We are deeply grateful for AGI's compassion and care for the people of North Korea and for their strong and enduring partnership with us in these efforts.

A CFK Board Member's Perspective:

Steve Aceto, a founding board member of CFK, was able to participate for 5 days of our 12 day visit. His last visit to DPRK was in September 2001, and he shares his perceptions of changes noted since that last visit nearly eight years ago.

Comparing this visit to my last visit in September 2001, and previous trips to the DPRK, from what I saw in Pyongyang and Sariwon, Koreans seem to be at least marginally better off from the earliest famine recovery years. Our relationship to the guides was marked by flexibility in scheduling far beyond anything I experienced before, and the severe limitations on picture-taking and casual contact with Koreans were far less evident on this trip.

The level of armed military presence in the city and on the roads seems to be drastically reduced, and the city folks at least generally appear well dressed and



purposeful but not so much in military style uniforms as before. There are street vendors peddling small stands of food and sundries, although the

retail storefronts appear no different. Shelves are relatively empty, appearing to stock no more than one or two items Soviet-style. Many buildings appeared to be getting or to have recently received face lifts, although there was some debris in the streets from crumbling facades under reconstruction.

There seem to be more children and the children appear to be livelier than before, although most appeared to be pre-teen or younger. Their ages seem to coincide with the easing of the most severe famine conditions; but perhaps I err in reckoning the ages of Koreans. I saw pets for the first time, dogs on leashes in Pyongyang and dogs in baskets at the rest homes, kept for different purposes, I suppose. Sariwon has spruced up their municipal park and it was bustling with children and adults.

The number of people moving about the open highways on foot or pushing carts was considerably less, though still present. Automobiles appeared to be newer and in better condition and not always

stuffed with people in army uniforms as before, and I saw only one wood-powered vehicle (some sort of bus). Traffic is still relatively light. There were still lots of work gangs in the fields and not much visible mechanized equipment, though there were lots of bicycles parked near the field gangs, so at least they have their own transportation.

The hospitals, rest homes, and other institutions seem to make as much use as possible of available land for gardening and, outside of Pyongyang animal husbandry. Some rest homes are more successful than others in raising pigs, goats, chickens and rabbits.



There were a fair number of people apparently harvesting or weeding something from the roadside grass in Pyongyang and at Mangyongdae in particular, but in my limited time outside Pyongyang, I did not see the well-worn pathways observed from previous visits which ran randomly up the hillsides and road embankments, possibly indicative of human foraging. Consistent with the warm hospitality shown to our delegation, the food we were served was plentiful and of good quality.

There is perhaps a real change in perceptions of foreigners among the Korean population. I noted that when I waved to people in buses or by the roadside, some actually waved back and smiled, something I never saw before.



Everywhere we went, CFK was greeted with warmth and appreciation. The years of CFK's dedicated efforts have resulted in significant and lasting physical improvements in many locations, large and small, and also in building great trust and respect at multiple levels of North Korean society. It is obvious that the opportunities and openness to Christian Friends of Korea's work and witness are greater than ever.

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.
The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth,
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.*

Psalm 145:17-19



P.O. Box 936 • Black Mountain, NC 28711

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

It is a privilege to share some of their own words with you...

"Please send our thanks to the donors." (Hospital director)

"The patients are happy with the canned meat. The Muscle Milk is very filling and healthy." (Rest home director)

"The Lab-in-a-Suitcase is incredibly convenient for us and we would like to have more training." (Hospital director)

"Thank you for coming a long way." (Rest home director)

"No one else has come to visit us since your last visit." (Rest home director)

With respect to the new water distribution system installed at the Kaesong Provincial Pediatric Hospital one year ago, the director replied, *"That's wonderful! I don't have to worry about (water) any more. No problems with freezing and we have plenty of water."* (Water was his highest priority concern about 2 years ago – this hospital serves over 30,000 children annually.)

"I really believe we are helping a lot of people. I am proud to be involved in CFK's work." (Ministry of Public Health official)

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS OF KOREA

Christian Friends of Korea is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization founded in 1995 to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through humanitarian, educational, and religious programs. Contributions to CFK are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. CFK also accepts stock or in-kind donations. Please make all checks payable to "Christian Friends of Korea."

If you are interested in supporting the work of CFK or to request information or materials, please contact us.

Christian Friends of Korea
P O Box 936
Black Mountain, NC 28711



Website: www.cfk.org
Tel: (828) 669-2355
Fax: (828) 669-2357
Email: cfk@cfk.org