



CHRISTIAN FRIENDS OF KOREA

조선의 그리스도인 벗들

October 2013

*"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for (Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Moses...) These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."
Hebrews 11:1-2, 39-40 NIV*

Dear Friends,

During our visit to DPRK from September 14 – October 1, our devotional time together was focused in Genesis on the covenant of faith and faithfulness between Abraham and God. It was a timely reminder that faith is a gift of God, and is in its essence a time of pregnant waiting, of incompleteness, yet grounded in the surety of God's grace and faithfulness.

The purposes of the DPRK visit from September 14-October 1 were three-fold: to continue construction of the new Training Center building located on the grounds of the Central TB Prevention Hospital, to continue training towards establishing quality diagnostic capability at the National TB Reference Lab, and to prepare for our November confirming visit.



A construction team made up of CFK volunteers and North Korean staff stand in front of the training center.



A CFK volunteer partners with a North Korean pharmacist to install the roof of the training center.

Training Center Progress:

Our team included nine members – two from Norway, two from Alaska, 3 from North Carolina, 1 from Washington, and our Stanford colleague who worked in the lab. We worked hard side by side with our North Korean colleagues to sheath the outside of the new training center building, first in plywood and then in lath (to hold the stucco which the North Koreans will apply during our absence); install the windows and doors, roofing and insulation; prepare for installation of the utilities; and complete much of the interior electrical work. The Lord provided good weather, and kept the team safe while working on scaffolding nearly two stories above the ground and on the roof trusses while installing the metal roofing.

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National TB Reference Lab Development:

As encouraging as it was to see the Training Center take shape day by day, progress made in the lab since our last visit in May was more static than we had hoped. The local power supply, while improving, is still not sufficient or fully reliable. The Ministry of Public Health strongly reassured us this time that they see this as a high priority and are strenuously working to remedy it. We hope this is the case, and we will be closely watching for further progress. Meanwhile, proficiency in daily tasks, documentation, understanding of the science behind various procedures, implications of test results, quality assurance and quality control measures, maintenance of equipment, and many other key elements have not yet been fully mastered at consistently high levels to assure reliable and consistent quality diagnostics for patients. In other countries, progress in these areas is achieved as a result of 1-2 years of daily professional mentoring, troubleshooting, and supervision by outside experts. But the DPRK allows us at this time only four 2-3 week visits/year, so progress is slow and uneven. Meanwhile, funding to support Stanford's continued technical assistance has been extremely difficult to secure and remains very precarious under the current political/diplomatic context. Despite these formidable challenges, the need for a National TB Reference Lab in the DPRK that provides quality diagnostics for TB and Multi Drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB) has only grown – so we continue to walk this uncertain and challenging road by faith and not by sight, while working hard to try to find resources that will sustain this effort and bring it forward successfully.



Twelve of the sixteen staff members at the National TB Reference Laboratory pose for a photo with Dr. Kathleen England of Stanford University.

On this visit, a special day-long Partners Meeting was organized for us by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) that included over twenty participants from Global Fund (for AIDS, TB and Malaria), WHO, UNICEF, MoPH, and the National TB Program to discuss the national TB strategy, the new funding round (2015-2018) under Global Fund and to specifically solicit our input. We were



Dr. Kathleen England presenting at the TB Partners meeting in Pyongyang.

asked to present on our work thus far. Our Stanford colleague reported on training activities at the National TB Reference Lab, while I gave a presentation on CFK's five-year effort to facilitate the partnership with Stanford and other trainers at the lab, progress made on the training center, and our multi-faceted work in the countryside to expand access to clean water, complete renovations, and support sustainable food supply through tractors/greenhouses/food at TB/hepatitis care centers. We also had separate technical discussions later with UNICEF and WHO representatives.

New Direction in TB Diagnostics:

During the five years it has taken to bring the National TB Reference Lab to its current state, an exciting new diagnostic tool was approved in late July by the FDA that is proving to be very effective in the fight against Multi-Drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB) worldwide. This rapid genetic-based testing has been successfully introduced in the DPRK, and accordingly, we are now recommending a slight shift in the diagnostic program for the DPRK that would expand the use of this new technology (GeneXpert) more widely, while continuing to build capacity and excellence in culture and drug sensitivity testing at the National TB Reference Lab. We hope that export licensing approval and funding for GeneXpert units (and consumables) will be forthcoming so that rapid diagnosis of suspected MDR-TB cases can be expanded nationally, reaching more people for treatment and thus reducing the spread of this deadly form of the disease.

New shipments and work:

Meanwhile, during our visit, an order of 27 greenhouse kits arrived at our logistics warehouse in Pyongyang. These kits are now scheduled for final delivery to the countryside prior to our November visit for use during the coming winter.

In a visit to the CFK greenhouse built in 2011 at the Central TB Prevention Hospital, we found a large crop of cantaloupes ripening from seeds we had delivered earlier this year. They picked several for us, which we took back to the hotel to share with our guides, drivers and local friends. Fresh fruit is expensive and is a special treat in the DPRK; the just-picked melons were delicious.



A cantaloupe is growing in the greenhouse at the Central TB Prevention Hospital.



Forty more deep water hand pumps like the one adjacent to a CFK greenhouse above have been confirmed at the CFK warehouse.



Metal donor plaques are affixed to the forty CFK water pump cover assemblies.

We also confirmed an order of deep water hand pumps that recently arrived at our warehouse for installation into newly drilled wells. We met with the local well-drilling entity, and they expect to use the Wellspring drill rig to drill three new wells for us during the first part of October (at Ryokpo TB Rest Home, Paechon County People's Hospital and Paechon TB Rest Home), and revisit two other sites in Haeju where wells were drilled earlier this year in order to install hand pumps at all five locations. More than ever, we are deeply committed to supporting clean water initiatives at TB and hepatitis care facilities that urgently need clean water. Out of our 29 supported places, we have installed nine water systems so far, and are now in the process of drilling new wells at five more places. This still leaves at least 15 of our supported places

that urgently need help with clean water. A new well can be drilled and a deep water hand pump installed for usually around \$3,000; a full solar-powered gravity-fed water system can be installed later for another \$15,000 - \$25,000. With your support, we hope to drill more wells and install systems at many more care centers.

In the meantime, while we raise the needed funds, we are sending point-of-use water filters (\$60 each), to immediately improve the quality of drinking water for patients and decrease the incidence of diarrhea, which negatively affects patient health and recovery from TB. With Multi-Drug Resistant TB rapidly expanding in the DPRK, we know that there is a high correlation between diarrhea and malnutrition, which makes people more susceptible to developing TB and MDR-TB – so the sooner this cycle can be broken, the better.



North Korean medical staff are learning about point-of-use water filters provided by CFK.

Sunday Worship:

We were greatly blessed this time to attend not only Sunday morning services at the Bongsu Church, but also attend a private home fellowship on two of the Sunday evenings we were in country. There is a small community of international Christians living in Pyongyang engaged in various kinds of work – and they meet in private homes on Sunday evening for a time of fellowship, worship, study of the Word and prayer together. We were grateful that our guides were willing to facilitate our transportation across the city so that we could attend these gatherings and receive and give encouragement to one another as part of the Body of Christ. Our time with them was a reminder of both the special opportunity God has given to CFK and others to serve our risen

Savior among the people of the DPRK, as well as of the loneliness, challenges and hardship that often come with such service. We were again reminded of how much we need to be praying for and encouraging our fellow brothers and sisters in such circumstances, while also seeking to be faithful to the calling our Lord places upon each of us to love and serve wherever He places us.

We were blessed to meet again with a few North Koreans we had not been able to see for some time – and God's transforming grace was evident in the warmth and depth of these encounters, and the changes we have seen in the attitudes of many officials towards us over time. Our final day in country included lengthy discussions and negotiations, followed by a farewell dinner of warm fellowship with our guides and drivers.

We are gearing up now for our fourth and final 2013 visit to the DPRK planned for November 9-23, which will include continued training at the National TB Reference Lab, as well as extensive travel to the countryside to confirm the arrival of multiple shipments (including food, medicine, blankets, etc.) and prepare for projects being planned for 2014. We hope to quickly raise the \$43,500 needed to complete the construction and furnishing of the Training Center (in March 2014) so training can commence once the building is dedicated for service.

While in some areas we can see clear progress in our work, in other areas of engagement it is harder to see the fruit of our labors – yet, we know that God is faithful and His Word will not return void. We continue to put our hope and trust in Him to bring to completion the work that He has begun in and through CFK and our partners. We ask for your faithful prayers, encouragement, and support as we continue this sojourn of faith among the North Korean people.

Blessings, and best,



Heidi S. Linton
Executive Director



The choir at Bongsu Church sings from their hymnals during Sunday worship.



We made great progress on the training center during the September trip. We hope to complete construction and install furnishings in the Spring.



A North Korean doctor working with our team for two weeks constructing the walls and roof of the new training center only wore oversized flip-flops on his feet.