

Living the Presence

*“He who believes in Me,
as the Scripture said,
‘From his innermost being
will flow rivers
of living water.’”*

—(John 7:38, NASB)



Introduction

There is a remarkable work going on in North Korea that few know about and it is progressing despite tremendous difficulties. It is a work that only our faithful Lord could have brought into being. It is amazing, but God has chosen a devoted group of academics to be His hands and voices in this work. There is no sending agency to find the workers and provide the needed resources, although the Northeast Asia Foundation for Education and Culture (NAFEC) has been working since 2001 to develop the campus in North Korea. Each worker is a volunteer who knows the Lord and is led to find his own support. He recognizes the Lord's leadership and faithfully responds.

In North Korea, the people whose Christian faith becomes known are persecuted for their faith. The citizens of this country supposedly have freedom of religion, but openly there are only a few churches in the capital city that serve as showplaces. Known Christians in other places are not tolerated. There are reported to be many underground Christians, although in North Korea there are no reliable numbers. North Korea is even more restrictive than China, and this is where Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (or PUST) is located. The principle of the work is to follow the laws of the land and give the best education possible to the students. Because the volunteers are practicing Christians, their lives and their practices

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must provide the lifestyle example without the spoken words that the government will not allow. These Christians who volunteer to work in this international educational institution agree that they will abide by the restrictions set by the North Korean Ministry of Education. They do not evangelize vocally, do not openly carry a Bible or hymnal and do not openly pray at meals, even as they maintain their own personal life of following the Lord. They depend on the Holy Spirit to interpret their actions, their lives and their examples to the students and the local advisers.

The Beginning

When the founder of an international university in China was approached by DPRK government representatives in 2001 with a request to start an international university in Pyongyang, it seemed an impossible task. The president called in his advisers and donors and asked for their help with this decision. After much prayer and offers of help from his advisers, he agreed to found this second university as well. Dr. James Chin Kyung Kim had made a commitment

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to God on the battlefield during the Korean War when he was still a teenager that he would love these enemies, the Chinese and North Koreans, for the rest of his life and he would teach them about Jesus. This was the reason that he had founded the university in China with the Lord's help and guidance. The Chinese university had prospered and grown rapidly, and the plan to use international Christian volunteers as the faculty and staff members had proven to be an excellent plan of operation. This new university would be God's university and the work was God's work. God would make it possible.

The Plans

Soon the word began to circulate about the plans for the new university. It would be a science and technology university which was to begin as a graduate school, and later would add the undergraduate classes. It would offer courses in agriculture, life sciences, electrical and computer engineering, economics, business and finance management and English. As the school developed, the future plans would include courses in architecture, construction engineering and the medical sciences. All students would begin with at least six months of required intensive English because all classes would be taught in English. Their English usage would require high-level competency in composition, speech, listening and reading comprehension in order to excel in the high level courses that the international professors would present in English.

Each faculty member would be required to have at least a master's degree in the area of his expertise and would need to be a native English speaker or an English speaker with near native competency. Academics with years of experience in the classroom were preferable, but academics with years of work experience in the field of that expertise were also desirable faculty members. The goal was to always provide high-level education in whatever area of the curriculum.

The international professors would also need to be very sensitive in dealing with things related to local customs that may be very different from their own customs. They would need to be ready to deal with expressions that mean different things in this local culture, as well as expectations under certain circumstances that may differ. The leaders are considered deities of a sort, and anything related to any of them must be treated with great respect. Taking a photo in a room where there are pictures of a leader on display means that one must show the entire picture of the leader or take the photo so that none of the picture shows. Such matters are included in the required orientation that takes place either just before the journey or immediately

after arrival in country and the internationals must be very careful to observe these matters.

Yet another, even more important requirement for the international faculty or staff is that they would need to live the life of a Christian as they perform these academic or administrative tasks. Jesus said that His followers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The Christians at PUST must live so that their lives will shine with the love of Jesus to all of the students and the North Korean workers who help on the campus, even though they are not allowed to use words to explain the meaning. Living a life that is always on public display means that the Christians must always show, with sincerity, their own joy at being at PUST and their love for the people around them. This takes a spiritually mature person who is daily depending on the Lord for His strength and His presence in their lives.

Accordingly, the plans also included the gatherings for regular worship and prayer that allow an individual to re-energize his spiritual life. Weekly there is a joint worship time for all of the international faculty and staff that involves a lot of personal participation. There are also Bible studies and small group prayer meetings that take place during the week. The monthly or bi-monthly pot-luck suppers provide great fellowship and variety from the food in the cafeteria. Sadly, these activities are not open to the North Korean students and workers, but they help to keep the faculty and staff close to each other and ready to lend support to their brothers when it is needed.

Interaction with the students and North Korean staff members

One of the long-term goals that the faculty and staff members have is to engage the students and the North Korean staff on as many levels as possible. The rules of engagement are that the internationals may not visit in the apartments or the offices with lone individuals. If a faculty member wants to talk with a student, he can request the student to come to his office and the professor will understand that inherently means that the student will have a companion with him. Conversely, the student may not have a private meeting with one of the international professors unless his partner or friend comes with him. That sounds very restrictive but there are so many informal ways to meet and converse with others that the internationals come to feel relatively close to many of the North Korean students. The internationals always must remember that they are the visitors and are the welcomed guests of the country, so they must *never* criticize the country or its people. They also must stay

away from conversations that include anything about culture, religion or politics. The point of being in the country is to try to set the example for peaceful interaction with each other.

One excellent way to encourage free conversation is for internationals to sit at the same table with students they know in the cafeteria. The tables have seats for only four people, so the conversations tend to be directly related to personal topics that someone wants to pursue.

The English corner groups are voluntary for the students, but are often well attended. They are excellent ways to be involved in informal conversations between the teachers and the students. There may be planned conversations or role-play games to stimulate talk. There may also be table games which allow informal conversation as the game moves along. The main thing, however, is that the object of being in the group is to stimulate English conversation. Practicing the use of English is a great way to learn English, but it is also a great way to stimulate informal conversations.

During the summer semester, the regular teachers are usually away and short-term volunteers take their places in the classrooms. The students love these youthful teachers who are so full of life and fun! The afternoons are all given to various activities designed to keep the students talking to each other and to the teachers. The students enjoy the extensive variety of activities. The classroom study is in the morning with only light homework assigned because the afternoons are so full for the students and the volunteer teachers. Conversational skills grow rapidly then, but the social skills also grow and the North Korean students come to know these short-term visitors well. Sporting activities lead to character development and understanding of integrity and a mutual respect and understanding is the natural result.

The Results

The results of the blending of these two very different groups of people is that each comes to know the other relatively well. There is acceptance of differences and tolerance develops for individual differences. There is also curiosity that stimulates questions from the students that let the professors know that they are questioning the spiritual things they have noted in the lives of these internationals. Privately, the professors rejoice because they know the Holy Spirit is at work. Remembering the students who were open and listening encourages the faculty to remember what Jesus said in John 7:38. The professors have been the channels for the Living Water and the Holy Spirit has been directing the flow. There will be fruit. This is the way of *peace!* 