

PROK, E-News, July 2005
The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea

PROK in Focus

1. Executive Officers Visit North Korea

Rev. Kim Dong-Won, Moderator, Rev. Yoon Kil-Soo, General Secretary and five other officers of the PROK made a solidarity visit to Pyongyang, North Korea on July 15-19. During their visit, the PROK officers held several meetings with the leaders of the Korean Christians Federation (KCF), and together articulated the role of the KCF and PROK in the movement for the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. The two churches agreed to explore the possibility of initiating a new joint project, such as a day care centre in North Korea. They also agreed to consolidate all their efforts to relieve the sufferings of the North Korean people who are facing a serious food crisis.

2. Symposium: "Stem Cell Research and Christian Ethics"

On July 4 the Church and Society Committee of the PROK General Assembly held a symposium under the theme "Stem cell research and Christian ethics". Dr. Ahn Kyu-Ree, a member of the stem cell research team headed by Dr. Hwang Woo-Suk who has gained international renown for his work, gave a keynote presentation explaining the contents of the research and the future research task, and Mr. Park Jae-Hyun of the Samsung Research Centre gave a counter-presentation opposing the research itself. The last speaker, Rev. Choi Hyung-Mook of the PROK provided a theological clue, approaching the stem cell research from the theological perspective. Rev. Choi warned, "We respect the scientific motivation of the stem cell research which aims to treat incurable diseases, but there is a high possibility that the research can be manipulated and abused by capitalistic motivation." He stressed that "the Korean church should develop a mechanism to monitor the research in order to protect the good will behind the research." The participants reached a common understanding that the outcome of the stem cell research should contribute to peace and the co-existence of human beings, sustaining the order of God's creation. In conclusion, the participants highlighted that "the role of churches is to challenge our society with a prophetic vision to look into the issue from the perspective of peace and co-existence."

3. Overseas Mission Consultation

On July 4 the Overseas Mission Committee of the PROK General Assembly organized a Mission Consultation to articulate its vision on overseas mission and prioritize its core projects for the years to come. The consultation was attended by 40 ministers including the moderators and overseas mission committee chairpersons of the 24 presbyteries of the PROK.

The participants highlighted that the PROK should develop more solid partnerships with Asian churches and societies, while at the same time sustaining our ongoing partnerships with other churches around the world in a more ecumenical way. The concluding recommendations included:

- 1) Strengthen relations with world ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).
- 2) More strongly promote youth, women's and lay leadership.
- 3) Develop projects in which local churches of the PROK can be involved.

4. Solidarity Team Visits Tsunami-Affected Area in Indonesia

On July 11-16 four representatives of the PROK made a solidarity visit to Ache and Nias, Indonesia in order to share the sufferings and pain of the victims of last year's tsunami. The PROK has provided funds for three-wheeled rikshas, fishing boats, and stationary and uniforms for school children, as well as seed money for a credit union, to the tsunami-affected families in those areas. Through this support about 60 families and 400 people have been able to begin rebuilding their lives with strong hope. The PROK is also cooperating with the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (Karo Batak Protestant Church) in constructing a new church in Nias Island where almost everything was totally destroyed by the tsunami. The team members met about fifteen internally displaced persons, all of whom had lost at least one family member. They were deeply moved by the power of love and compassion shown by these and others who, even in their terrible suffering, were helping one another and keeping a strong hope for their future lives.

5. Life and Peace Internship in Asia

The Overseas Mission Department of the PROK General Assembly office recently launched a new project, "Life and Peace Internship in Asia", to encourage young leaders in the PROK to learn about Asia and its churches and societies. This internship project particularly aims to train the young people as peace and justice-minded persons. This year two interns will be sent in September to "Action Asia" in Cambodia and "Peace for Life" in the Philippines. Action Asia is an international NGO which works for conflict transformation and peace initiatives in Asia and the wider world. Peace for Life, based in the Philippines, is a global faith-based initiative resisting militarized globalization and creating life-enhancing alternatives.

Ecumenical Movement in Focus

In our Korean people's journey toward peace and unification, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) and the Korea Christians Federation (KCF) in the North have met together once a year since 1989 to commemorate the August 15th anniversary of liberation from Japan's colonial rule by jointly writing the people's common prayer for peace and reunification. The NCCCK every year asks partner churches around the world to join the Korean people in this heartfelt prayer of pain and faith-filled hope. This year's prayer is reprinted here by permission of the NCCCK. Together with the NCCCK and KCF we ask you to share this prayer in your respective churches on the Sunday closest to August 15th.