PROK E-NEWS
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PROK IN FOCUS

1. UCC-PROK Partnership Consultation held in Toronto

The United Church of Canada (UCC) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) have recently concluded their bilateral partnership consultation in Toronto, Canada. It was held on May 22-27, after twelve years since the last consultation of this nature. The PROK was represented by eight participants headed by the Moderator and the General Secretary together with the representatives from National Women’s Association, The National Youth Association and Hanshin University. Meanwhile, the UCC as the counterpart church was represented by some of its General Assembly officers, the national staff, youth and women representatives.

The Partnership Consultation was held purposely to reaffirm the churches’ unity in Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God for guiding both churches in their ecumenical journey for more than a century. It was also an occasion for renewing their solidarity in their work with marginalized people in both contexts and in the world. The consultation also serves as a platform for gaining wisdom and encouragement in consolidating their efforts of becoming sustainable visioning communities in their respective societies. Apparently, the two days consultation gave ample time for the participants to exchange their theological and ethical perspectives on the emerging issues and challenges that impact their mission work. Not just this, they also shared their unique and creative mission strategies as responses to the challenges faced by both churches.

Interestingly, the participants trudged on the common understanding of the neo-liberal economic globalization which is being supported by the ideology of the US Empire and backed by the military power that consequently threaten human security and destroying the integrity of God’s creation. At the conclusion of the discussion, participants made a resolve through a recommendation that both churches side by side with ecumenical bodies worldwide to articulate their theological perspectives and to address the impact of economic globalization on the poor and the marginalized people by developing mission programs that will avert it. In line with this, one of the concrete recommendations is the formation of UCC-PROK Joint Study Group on Economic Justice. This Joint Study Group is conceived as a crucial venue in addressing the issues and concerns on economic justice and ecological crisis. Another recommendation agreed upon is the strengthening of the personnel exchange and internship programs for youth and women that will help enable sustainable leadership development.

The PROK participants made good observations and learning from the consultation particularly the democratic participation and processes used in the UCC and the inclusive
church’s polity that allows the laity including the youth and women to fully participate in the life and mission of the Church. The exposure of the participants in the conferences, presbyteries and outreach communities gave them a wider understanding of the various mission programs of the United Church of Canada.

On the whole, the bilateral partnership between the PROK and the UCC which was formalized through a partnership covenant in 1955 is deepened through this recently concluded consultation. The long history of partnership through exchange of ecumenical co-workers has been a remarkable example in the Korean ecumenical community. Not just this, for in the ecumenical arena, both churches along with other churches around the world have committed themselves for the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula and to work hand in hand with the Minjung or marginalized people.

2. PROK Conducts Consultation on Mission with Migrant Workers

It is indeed timely for the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) to ask the question ‘How will the Church carry out her mission for migrant workers?’ which was also made as the theme of the consultation on mission with the migrant workers held on April 30- May 1 in the town of Yeosong, 120 kilometers south of Seoul. The consultation is one of a kind conducted by the PROK purposely to gather the Church constituent ministers and social workers who have been ministering in the several migrant workers centers in South Korea.

The consultation was aimed at enhancing the Church’s mission policy, drawing out workable strategies and agreeing on sustainable ministry for migrant workers and for foreign women married to Korean citizens through counseling work, human rights advocacy and other social welfare programs carried out by the centers strategically located in Seoul, Incheon, Ansan, Cheongju, Gwangju and other cities and towns. The Church through the centers has been involved in the migrant workers ministry especially with women migrants and foreign women married to Korean citizens. South Korea is host to more than 400,000 migrant workers both documented and undocumented coming from countries like China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Sri-Lanka, Indonesia and few other countries.

The PROK consultation was attended by some 25 participants that started with the biblical-theological presentation given by the Rev. Lee Yeong-Jae. Setting the theological context of the consultation, Rev. Lee emphasized that the Church ought to internalize the theology of migration, which the PROK must articulate in the context of neo-liberal globalization. Taking the biblical examples of migration, he connects the Church’s mission for the ijumin, a Korean word for migrants, to God’s protecting providence on the Hebrew people who were sojourners in the land of Canaan and of God’s love and mercy for the Christian diaspora in many places in the world.

Thereafter, were the presentations of administrators of migrant workers centers from different cities: First was from Rev. Park Kyeong-Soo, the head of the Incheon Migrant Workers Centre, in which he described the extent of social services rendered for the migrant workers in the city of Incheon. He stressed the importance of having a clear perspective and guidelines how to carry out the mission with migrant workers. For him
the mission for migrant workers is in fact a peacemaking mission that encourages both Koreans and migrants to have a meaningful co-existence which he termed as ‘living in peace.’

Next were the presentations of the Rev. Han Kuk-Yeom, the executive officer of the Seoul Women Migrants Human Rights Centre and Rev. Ko Eun-Young, head of Women Migrants Centre in Cheongju, respectively. Both women ministers implement programs focused on women migrant workers and foreign women married to Korean citizens. They mentioned that there is an increasing number of women migrant workers in South Korea and there are 159,942 foreign women married to Korean men who have settled down and are now raising their own children in the country. Both women ministers stressed that the Church must be actively involved in raising the level of people’s consciousness toward a pluralistic society. This means that the Church should serve as the precursor of social acceptance and protector of the rights and welfare of women migrant workers and foreign women having Korean spouses and mixed race children.

The last presentation was given by Rev. Yoon Seung-Hyeon, who is head of Gwangju Support Centre for North Korean refugees. He is ministering to a community of refugees from North Korea in Gwangju, a city in southwestern part of the Korean Peninsula. He disclosed that from 1989 up to February 2007 there is a total of 10,092 North Korean refugees who came to South Korea. More than half of the number of refugees who are adapting to life in South Korea are unemployed and are receiving support from the government and non-government organizations. Many are working in factories and a small portion of them are employed in the small to medium scale factories and some are students and cultural performers.

The theme which serves as the guiding light of the consultation did not only allow resource persons to inform the participants about the social services rendered by the various migrant workers and the refugee centers to vulnerable immigrant individuals and communities but also encouraged them to envisage better working and living arrangements for them and make the mission of the Church for migrant workers and the whole immigrant community in South Korea pro-active and relevant. The consultation was concluded with the participants agreeing on the basic theological principles and strategies on how to improve the Church’s migrant workers and refugee ministry.

ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN FOCUS

The 4th North-South Korean Christian Prayer Convocation and Choir Festival

The 4th North-South Korean Christian Prayer Convocation and Choir Festival held on June 5-6 in Mount Kumgang was a historical event for the members of Churches belonging to the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) and the representatives of the Korea Christian Federation (KCF) in North Korea. The NCCK and the KCF jointly organized this event to foster greater unity among Christians in the Korean Peninsula and to encourage their constituent members to earnestly pray for peace and reunification. There were 400 participants coming from South Korean Churches, while ten (10) from the KCF. The North Korean delegation was headed by the Rev. Kang Young-Seob, the President of the KCF. The South Korean churches that were represented in the event are the Korean Methodist
Church, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), and The Salvation Army. There were 70 participants from the PROK and composed of both ministers and the laity.

The hope for peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula has always been at the heart of this Pan-Korean Prayer and Convocation for Peace. Thus in the prayer gathering, the Salvation Army Commander Chun Kwang-Pyo, NCCK President eloquently described the kind of reunification process the Korean people ought to pursue saying, “the reunification must be achieved peacefully and without any intervention of foreign powers.” Anent this, in his message during the convocation the Rev. Kang Young-Seob, KCF representative, reminded the participants of the spirit of the June 15 Joint Statement that emphasizes peace, reconciliation, cooperation and autonomy in the reunification process.

The event received positive reactions from the participants and most of them said that “The 4th North-South Korean Prayer Convocation and Choir Festival in Mount Kumgang. They said that, “the event was very powerful and spiritual because we were able to reaffirm our oneness in Jesus Christ.” “We believe that our determination to live in Christian unity will empower us to move further in our journey towards peace and reunification in spite of all our differences,” others commented.

After the liturgical activities representatives of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) and the Korea Christian Federation (KCF) met to discuss the decisions and recommendations made by the Ecumenical Consortium for Peace and Social Development in North Korea or better known as the “Consortium” which was established in Hong Kong in December 2006. The NCCK acting as an advocate discussed thoroughly the idea and plan of action of the Consortium and was able to convince the KCF to join as the North Korean counterpart body to realize the proposed projects for peace and social development for North Korea. The church leaders who discussed the future of the Consortium are Rev. Kwon Oh-Sung, NCCK General Secretary, Rev. Lee Jong-Bok, the chairperson of the reunification committee, Rev. Hwang Pil-Kyu, the executive secretary of the same committee and Rev. Chae Hea-won, a Consortium staff, while the KCF was represented by the Rev. Kang Young-Seob, Rev. Oh Kyung-Woo, Secretary, Rev. Lee Jung-Ro, who in charge of international concerns, Mr. Kim Hyun-Chul, Rev. Lee Song-Sook, and Rev. Sohn Hyo-Soon.

The PROK as one of the active participants in peace and reunification process in the Korean Peninsula believes that the North-South Korean Christian Prayer Convocation should be held regularly so as to provide a strong momentum in opening up a new history of Korean Christianity that will eventually lead to peaceful reunification of the two countries.

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