

Report from Korean Partnership Visit

23-30 April 2015

Ginny McDaniel and Doug Williams (Granby First Church)

We were privileged to have the opportunity to represent the Connecticut Conference of the UCC for a week's visit to the churches of the Kyung-Ki Presbytery, PROK. Thank you for this honor!

23/24 April 2015

Our Delta flight (through Detroit) somehow managed to knock an hour off the flight time and we arrived at Incheon and cleared customs well before our hosts arrived to meet us! Rev. Lee, Sun Jun, one of the vice pastors at Suwon Church, showed up at the scheduled time and, after some cell phone conversation, arranged for us to meet up with Rev. Bae, Hyun-Suk (delayed by Friday afternoon traffic) at a gas station nearby. Bae flung the 4x6 foot welcome banner out of his car: "Welcome to Korea Rev. Dr. Ginny and Doug!" Dinner at an Outback Restaurant in Bundang before an early bedtime in Suwon.

[In honor of our recent marriage, we were put up at a hotel in Suwon for the first three nights as the guests of Rev. Kang, and in guest quarters at a very modern apartment complex near Han Mok Church for the next three nights (arranged by a lay leader there). We gather there was some consternation about this, as the precedent has always been to learn from home stays. We felt terrible when we heard that it created a problem, but were grateful for their generosity.]

Saturday 25 April 2015

Our day began with a picnic at a riverside park in lovely Yeosu (home of the ceramics craft in Korea) for the women of the churches in the southern region of Kyung-Ki Presbytery. Three of the women had a special picnic prepared for us, grilling meats on a portable propane grill which we then wrapped in lettuce leaves with a variety of delicious condiments. After lunch, Rev Bae made a lengthy introduction of us to the assembled group drawing laughter—we can only imagine! I greeted them and taught them our Caribbean "Hallelu" which they joined in singing.

Afternoon touring included the opening ceremony of the World Ceramics Biennale (with Korean drumming) and a visit to the Silleuksa Temple, a 1000-year-old Buddhist temple that is still active, before which stands a 600-year-old ginkgo tree. After coffee at Choweol Church, we were guests for the presbytery opening reception dinner in our honor. All the partner churches were represented, along with Kyung-Ki moderator Rev Kim, Gwan-Ho and moderator-elect Rev. Choi, Jong-Bok. Sanwoon Church was very nearby, so we asked to visit there next and Rev. Lee introduced us to the new members' class and we had our picture with them.



Sunday 26 April 2015

We were invited first to participate in the 11 am worship at Han Mok Church (pictured left), the newest of our sister congregations. Miss Chang was provided as the translator for my sermon (she was marvelous, speaking from just the English text), and Doug sang "One More Circle around the Sun," a song about the need to work as partners. Rev. Choi, Dong-Jin had selected a hymn about peace to follow the sermon, and provided an English text for us to sing too. It was very moving. Always good to sing together.

Lunch followed worship in Han Mok's new five-story mission center next door (classrooms, meeting space, a first-floor coffee shop, and cafeteria on the top floor). We had just enough time to listen to the praise choir practice for the afternoon service before we were whisked away to nearby Suwon Church...

arriving there just in time for the end of their afternoon service! Rev. Kang introduced us, and we all adjourned outside for the dedication of their peace pole. More than 50 people attended.

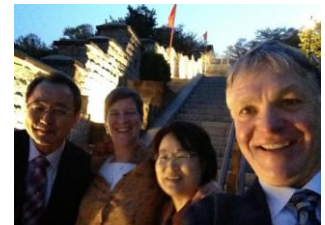
Four plaques for a peace pole (declaring “May peace prevail on earth” in different languages) were the gift of the Granby youth who participated in the Sacred Journey exchange in 2014. They had not had a chance to make a presentation of the gift and we weren’t sure what had become of them until we were preparing for this trip. The gift was embraced! Suwon Church had installed the peace pole outdoors at the front of the sanctuary, and added four more plaques to represent the countries where they have mission outreach—China, Nepal, Philippines (and also Japan).



I had written a short dedication ceremony which Rev. Chang translated in advance. It included scripture and prayer in both Korean and English. At the appropriate moment elders of the church joined Rev. Kang and me in pulling off the cover to reveal the pole. Each person held a brightly painted stone to remind them of “unpeaceful” actions and thoughts and, after a minute of silence, we put them down at the base of the pole. Doug and I brought four rocks home from the dedication ceremony to add to the base of our peace pole in Granby.



Supper that evening with three pastors of Suwon Church was at a traditional Korean restaurant whose specialty was chueotang soup. We would perhaps have enjoyed it more had Esther (Rev. Kang’s wife) not described in detail that it was made from ground whole mudfish, a type of bottom fish similar to eel. Yes, it was the color of mud, and a bit crunchy, but delicious. I think they were impressed that we cleaned our bowls. “Not all Koreans like it,” they admitted! Afterwards we strolled along the ancient walls of Suwon, Hwaseong Fortress, with Rev. Kang, Seong-Woo and Esther.



Monday 27 April 2015

We packed up and had an early breakfast so we were ready for our ride to Han Mok Church at 9:30 for the Annual Meeting of the Kyung-Ki Presbytery. For the opening worship I was to concelebrate communion with Rev. Kim, the outgoing moderator, an honor. (I hadn’t known this in advance, so it was fortunate that I had done it three years earlier and some idea what to expect... also that our luggage was down in Rev. Choi’s office and my robe and a stole could be quickly collected. (Thank you Rev. Bae, for once again saving the show!)

Later, after reading Rev. Siladi’s greeting to the Presbytery, I made a brief presentation (with slides) about the history of the United Church of Christ, again with thanks to Rev. Bae for his translation and explanation help. This was greatly appreciated, several pastors told me afterward. Apparently our common Calvinist roots were not known, and they were fascinated to hear about some of the UCC “firsts.”



A special table was then moved to the center of the stage, with two copies of a new partnership agreement in blue velvet folders—one in English and one in Korean. With great solemnity, we signed these (Rev. Kim, Gwan-Ho, the outgoing moderator, Rev. Kim, Moon-Hee, the outgoing Overseas Committee Chair, and me, with space for Kent to sign back in Connecticut). Gifts were exchanged, and it was time for lunch.

NOTE: I had brought a gift for the *new moderator* but he hadn't yet taken office, and Bae said "No, the gift is for the outgoing moderator." This was a problem because the moderator gift I brought was a UCC comma stole, identical to the one we presented to Rev. Kim, Gwan-Ho at the October meeting in Connecticut. Fortunately I had another gift in my bag.

Over coffee later with Rev. Lee ("Sean" – who was our tour guide for the next two days) and Jackie, the lay missions leader at Han Mok Church, we compared notes on the difficulty of reaching young people, a common problem. They, too, favor the action/reflection model of formation. Experience is key! Sean was ordained in the PCUSA in Savannah, Georgia, where he pastored a Korean congregation for 9 years before returning to Korea and the PROK. He previously served a Chinese immigrant congregation in Seoul (and learned Chinese as a result) and now is the founding pastor of a new church start in Kyung-Ki Presbytery. Jackie, we learned, will be taking a group of 18 youth and adults to Thailand this summer. I asked how the church funds such projects and he said that the church covers about 2/3 of the cost.

To make us feel welcome in the guest room at Jackie's apartment complex, they provided a potted geranium (important to have something growing!), fruit, juice, milk and yogurt, a teapot and packets of instant coffee. How considerate they all are!



Monday afternoon we had a relaxed walk through the Folk Village in Yong-In with Sean, arriving late afternoon when busloads of Chinese school children were just leaving. Then we met up with Sean's wife Gina at a lovely riverside restaurant for a splendid meal that Gina (a professor of nutrition) had arranged. There were at least 13 main dishes (not counting all the sides), including: pancake with veggies, soup, flounder sushi, sweet potato noodles, steak tartare with pear and radish, scallop and octopus with ginkgo seeds, dok galbi (meat patty), whole stuffed shrimp,

chopped jelly fish marinated in mustard, spicy beef soup with pumpkin, soybean soup with tofu and smoked squid. Was that 13? Later, we joined good friends Choi, Bae and Lee for a couple hours of singing at the norebang. Doug and Rev. Lee were a great pair. Don't tell—Korean pastors aren't supposed to have so much fun! And called it a night at midnight.



Tuesday, 28 April 2015

Jackie kindly delivered some rolls and fruit to our door for breakfast, anticipating that we might be tired after our late night! Arriving at Han Mok, we learned they wanted Doug to sing... **IMPORTANT RULE: ALWAYS BE PREPARED!** (Meaning: take spare clothes and shoes in your backpack for whatever occasion, and all your prepared materials, because you never know!) Doug was ready. It was a lovely way to say goodbye. For the afternoon, Sean took us to the DMZ so Doug could experience that. The bus tour that included Doosan Station (a huge modern train station that has no trains... but is ready, once the two Koreas are reunited), the third incursion tunnel (discovered in 1978), and the overlook from which you can see Gaesong Industrial Area several kilometers beyond the "green zone" (DMZ).



Wednesday, 29 April 2015

Rev. Choi Dong-Jin (Han Mok) and Rev. Jung, Keung-Young (new Overseas Committee Chair) drove us into Seoul to witness the weekly demonstration in front of the Japanese Embassy. (Rev. Bae and Rev. Lee met us there.) See attached sermon for a description. There was a heightened security and media presence because of Japanese PM Abe, Shinzo's planned speech later before a Joint Session of Congress in Washington.

When the demonstration ended, the six of us had lunch in Insadong (the pedestrian shopping district in Seoul), as guests of Rev. Kim, Gwan-Ho. **There, we discussed some future ideas for the partnership, in particular the idea of extended internships in CT churches. Rev. Bae raised concerns about health insurance and compensation. But he had in mind his vice pastor as a good candidate—a capable young pastor who would go far with English language fluency. His suggestion (to the best of my understanding) was that the person should spend 6 months in intensive language study and then six months shadowing the host pastor, focusing on church administration.**

Later, Rev. Bae's wife joined us for afternoon tea in a traditional Korean tea house and, following a long drive (at rush hour), we had dinner at a galbi restaurant in Hanam City owned by one of the members of Rev. Kim, Moon-Hee's church—as his guest. (Did I mention that our Korean hosts see that we are well fed?) We joined his congregation later for the Wednesday evening worship at Gambukdong Church, where participants were taking turns reciting a passage from Deuteronomy that they'd been challenged to memorize. Rev. Kim invited us forward to bring greetings and say a word about our partnership. Finally, to cap off a memorable week, we were guests of Revs. Bae and Choi at a wine bar (managed by Rev. Bae's niece) for a celebratory toast. (We learned that these two have been friends for over 30 years, longer than either has known their wife, since university. They still enjoy playing soccer together, now on the Kyung-Ki Presbytery team, with Rev. Choi at center forward and Rev. Bae as a right forward.)

Next October in Connecticut!

Some ideas for their visit:

- Brownstone Quarry or Berkshire East for ziplining (and shopping at the Native American souvenir shop there)
- Lobster at the shore
- Barbecue at Bear's or steakhouse for bison burgers
- Par 3 golf scramble to be arranged by Doug
- Hike up Talcott Mountain in Avon
- Beer tasting at one of the local breweries or wine tasting...

We have such a long way to go to even come close to their hospitality!