



Commemorating the First General Meeting of the North Korean Mission, October 11, 1939

Photo courtesy of North Korean Mission.

North Korean Mission

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North Korean Mission (aka. Bukandaehoe) is a mission belonging to the Korean Union Conference, which is currently unable to reach administrative power due to the political division in the land. The mission was organized as the North Chosen Mission in 1934,¹ and after the liberation of 1945, South Korea was divided into North and South Korea, but the entire region belonging to North Korea was organized as the North Korean Mission of Seventh-day Adventists.²

Current Territory and Statistics

The territory of the North Korean Mission is now the part of Korea lying north of the armistice line. North Korea is politically isolated; so, the mission's statistics cannot be specifically verified. However, according to the data reported so far, the North Korean Mission has a population of 25,779,000 and 866 members in 26 churches.³

Origin of Adventist Work in the Territory of the Mission

The North Korean region was the first place where the Adventist Church was settled in Korea. In 1904 the first Adventist Church was established in northwestern Korea, including Jinnampo and Soonan. After William Smith, the first missionary sent to Korea, settled in Soonan in 1906, it became the headquarters of the Korean Adventist Church and became the center of evangelical ministry with the establishment of a school and a hospital.⁴ After establishing its headquarters in Soonan, the gospel was spread to Hwanghae-do, including Haeju and Pyeongan-do and Pyongyang, all of which belonged to North Korea. As such, the early ministry of the Korean Adventist Church was concentrated in North Korea.

When the Korean Mission was organized in October 1908 and its headquarters moved to Seoul in 1909, the message of the Adventist Church began to spread to the south-central region of Korea.⁵ However, it was still in the northwest that led to the growth of the Adventist Church. The Korean Mission held the first General Meeting in August 1910 and divided the nation into four mission fields. The area of North Korea was divided into northeast region and northwest region. And Pastor W. R. Smith was in charge of missionary work in the northeast region, and Dr. Russell was in charge of missionary work in the northwest region.⁶

It was not until 1919 that the Korean Adventist Church organized local missions. The Korean Mission was promoted to the Korean Conference in February 1917 and was upgraded to another level in March 1919, becoming the Chosen (Korean) Union Mission (CUM).⁷ The CUM consisted of a West Korean Conference (WKC), Central Korean Mission (CKM), and South Korean Mission (SKM). The North Korean mission has not yet been formed at this time, as the North Korean region has been divided into parts of the WKC and CKM.

The first Korean pastor to serve as a director in the North Korean region divided into the WKC and CKM was Moon Guk Chung. He became the first Korean pastor to be ordained in 1915 and was appointed director of the CKM, including some of the North Korean regions, at the 3rd General Meeting of CUM held in June 1923.⁸ Two years later, in 1925, Geun Eok Lee was appointed as the director of the WKC,⁹ and two Korean pastors became the directors for the two missions in the North Korean region.

It was in 1934 that the North Chosen (Korean) Mission was officially organized in Korea. At the CUM Council Meeting held from late May to early June of 1934, CUM was reorganized into five missions. The North Chosen Mission was assigned to the northeastern part of Hamgyong-do and Gangwon-do. The northwestern regions of

Pyeongan-do and Hwanghae-do were also part of the North Korean region, but the initial North Chosen Missions did not have jurisdiction over the entire North Korean region because they were organized as a West Chosen Mission. Thus, the North Chosen Mission was born, and Pastor Dong Sim Chyong was appointed as the first director.¹⁰

Organizational History

In 1939 churches in North Korea were concentrated in the northwest. During this period there were 35 churches and 1,476 members in the northwestern region. In comparison, there were about fifteen churches in the northeastern region. In 1939 churches in North Korea were concentrated in the northwest. During this period there were 35 churches and 1,476 members in the northwestern region. In comparison, there were about fifteen churches in the northeastern region.¹¹ In December 1943 the church was dissolved due to the Japanese imperial invasion, which forced the church to stop growing for some time.

On August 15, 1945 Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule. Church leaders re-engaged to rebuild churches in North Korea. The congregation held a General Meeting in October 1945 to rebuild the church that had been dissolved before liberation.¹² Pastor Myeon Gil Kim, who was appointed as a visiting pastor at the congregation's General Meeting, visited Jangmae-ri Church located in Daedong-gun, Pyeongannam-do in November 1945 and led the youth training meeting for two weeks. About sixty young people attended the meeting, and several young people were baptized at the end of the meeting.¹³

On December 23 of that year, Pastor Sung Won Im, who was temporarily appointed as the director of the Chosen Union Mission at the congregation's General Meeting, also went on a tour to take care of churches in the North Korean region. He toured Sariwon Church, Jaeryeong Church, and Heukgyo Church and led the Sabbath worship service at Soonan Church on the 29th. After the Sabbath service at the Sundol Church on January 5, the council of the West Chosen Mission was held on January 7 to make efforts to rebuild the church in the North Korean region. The next day a week-long Bible study meeting was held at Pyongyang Church, with lecturers Sung-Won Lim, Ok-Jin Yoon, and Sung-Hoon Choi. After that he toured the churches in Jangma-ri, Guryong-ri, Jinnampo, Geojang-ri, and Haeju to reconstruct the churches in North Korea.¹⁴

When the Korean Adventist Church was rebuilt, the Far Eastern Division (FED) appointed Ralph S. Watts as the superintendent of the Korean Union Mission (KUM) in 1946.¹⁵ Pastor Watts held a council meeting of KUM from 7 to 11 in April 1946 and was appointed as the director of the four missions at the council. At that time Korea was divided into the 38th parallel north due to political problems, with capitalist regimes in the south and socialist regimes in the north. This made it very difficult to manage churches in North Korea. Therefore, the KUM organized the entire North Korean region into a mission and appointed Pastor Sung Won Im as the director of the mission. On April 29 he went to the North Korean region, visited several churches, and held a council meeting with leaders of the North Korean local churches at Pyongyang Church in mid-May. The council agreed

to establish the headquarters of the NKM within the Pyongyang Church.¹⁶

The NKM held a General Meeting of members of the North Korean Church at Sundol Church from October 15 to 18, 1946. A total of 300 church members, including 80 full-time representatives and 200 general representatives, attended at the General Meeting. The participants approved NKM's leaders--(director) Sung Won Im and (secretary) Yong Hwan Song--through this general meeting. The meeting also approved Won Sil Park, Young Jun Cha, Ga Hyuk Jeon, Bong Deok Kim, Sung Chul Kim, Sung Hoon Choi, Ui Deok Ha, Jung Sook Hwang, and appointed Tae Kyung Im, Sun Eok Kim, Won Shin Na (pastor Geun Eok Lee's widow), and Hyung Shin Choi (pastor Sin Hoo Hong's widow).¹⁷

After the General Meeting was completed, a Youth Training Winter School was held at Soonan Church for two months from November 19, 1946 to January 19, 1947. At the Training School led by Sung Won Im and Ga Hyuk Jeon, young people studied the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy for 60 days and were deeply impressed. About fifty young people who attended the Winter School organized the Fellowship Association after the meeting, scattered throughout the North Korean region and carried out missionary work. As a result, 55 churches in North Korea were actively engaged in missionary work, according to a report in the *Church Compass* in August 1947.¹⁸

During this time, the North Korean region was much stronger than the South. Statistics from the 15th General Meeting of the KUM held in June 1948 show that the NKM had 866 members in 64 churches and 2,265 students in Sabbath Schools. Considering that there were 1,992 students in the Central Korean Mission and 491 students in the South Korean Mission at the time, it can be seen that missionary activities in North Korea were more active than in South Korea.¹⁹

However, by late 1947, South and North Korea had established their own governments, and the ideological confrontation between the two governments intensified. In particular, North Korea began to control Christianity to establish a socialist republic (DPRK). As a result, missionary work in North Korea has become increasingly difficult. Pastor Sung Won Im, who returned to Pyongyang after the 15th KUM General Meeting held in Seoul in 1948, was arrested and tortured by allegations of being a spy sent from South Korea, making it increasingly difficult for leaders to conduct missionary work and church administration.²⁰

In 1949 the North Korean government organized the Christian League of North Korea and united all Christianity in the North into one denomination. And all churches prohibited worship other than regular worship and prohibited missionary work. This has forced NKM's activities to further decline. However, it was after the Korean War that the NKM's ministry work weakened sharply. On June 25, 1950, the Korean War broke out and churches in South Korea suffered a lot of damage. The initial damage was mainly caused in the South, so the North Korean church members were not well aware of the war situation. However, the involvement of the U.N. forces reversed the pattern of the war, and North Korean churches were also severely damaged as the region was occupied by South Korean and U.N. forces. In October 1950, leaders of the KUM, including Young Seop Oh and

Hae Sung Lee, entered the North Korean region to search the situation of the church and try to reconstruct it. However, church leaders could no longer remain in the North Korean region as the Chinese intervention turned the tide again, forcing South Korean and U.N. forces to retreat south of the 38th parallel. They hurried back to South Korea, when about one hundred church members also fled to the South.²¹

By 1952 the Korean War had reached a stalemate, and discussions on a ceasefire began in earnest. Therefore, the 16th General Meeting of KUM, which was not held due to the war, was held in Cheongju in May 1952. At the General Meeting, the KUM divided the South Korean area into three missions: Central Korean Mission (Junghan Daehoe), Southeast Korean Mission (Yeongnam Daehoe), and Southwest Korean Mission (Honam Daehoe), and reorganized the entire North Korean region into North Korean Missions.²² Thus, the North Korean Mission became an administrative organization that controlled the entire North Korean region. However, North Korea has become an isolated area no longer within South Korea's administrative power. Therefore, KUM appointed Lim Sung-won, who was in charge of the North Korean mission, as the director of the KUM's Evangelical Crusade.²³

The Korean War ended on July 27, 1953 with the signing of an armistice. As a result, South Korea and North Korea became divided countries forever. Under these circumstances, the North Korean church was forced to maintain its faith only in home chapels under orders from the North Korean authorities to disband the church. In addition, the KUM in South Korea could no longer grasp the situation of the North Korean church. Since then North Korea's mission has remained only organizational but no longer exists as a missionary organization.²⁴ The Korean Union Conference organized a committee for the mission of North Korea in November 1990 to establish a plan to restore the North Korean church and wait for the two Koreas to unify.²⁵

List of Presidents

Dong Sim Chyong (1934-1939); Chi Hwan Cho (1939-1940); Hang Mo Kim (1940-1943); Sung Won Im (1945-1954).

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1935), 120.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 105.
3. Number of churches and membership in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are estimates based on latest figures available (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* [2021], accessed July 8, 2021, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=10167>).
4. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean Seventh-day Adventists*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 89-91.
5. *Ibid*, 132-133.
6. I. H. Evans, "The Korean General Meeting," *ARH*, November 24, 1910, 9.
7. I. E. Evans, "Meeting of the Chosen Union Mission," *ARH*, August 7, 1919, 14.
8. F. G. Gilbert, "The Chosen Union Biennial Meeting," *ARH*, September 20, 1923, 18.
9. O. A. Hall, "The Chosen Union Biennial Meeting," *ARH*, October 1, 1925, 16.
10. *Church Compass*, July 1934, 2, 3. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1935), 120.
11. *Church Compass*, June 1939, 21.
12. *Church Compass*, July 1948, 13, 14.
13. Jae Shin Kim, *History of the SDA in North Korea* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 1993), 237.

14. Yung Lin Lee, *A Comprehensive Study in the History of the Adventist Church in Korea* (Seoul: Sunmyung Cultural Press, 1968), 206.
 15. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 104.
 16. Sung Won Im, "Church Ministries in North Korea," *Church Compass*, November 1971, 51.
 17. *Church Compass*, December 1946, 18. Sung Won Im, 51.
 18. *Church Compass*, August 1947, 15.
 19. *Church Compass*, July 1948, 16.
 20. Sung Won Im, "Being Imprisoned," *Church Compass*, December 1971, 20.
 21. Yung Lin Lee, 239.
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 23. *Church Compass*, May 1954, 48.
 24. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955), 92.
 25. "Resolution No. 90-388," *Minutes of the Executive Committee of Korean Union Conference, 1990* (Seoul: Korean Union Conference, 1990).
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