

## **FIRST AND CENTER**

### **Pastor's Blog**

**April 12, 2018**



*Suwon, South Korea*

Next Monday, April 16, I am joining nine other clergy and lay members of Connecticut UCC churches to travel to South Korea. We will be staying with members of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), with whom the Conference has had a partnership relationship for more than twenty years. Several local congregations are partnered with Korean congregations, and most of our delegation are going to visit those partners. So, why am I going?

1. Our Conference Minister, Kent Siladi, invited me to consider coming in order to explore a partnership between Center Church and an urban congregation in Korea. Most partners in CT are rural or suburban, and most churches in the PROK are urban. I will be visiting the Doonjeon Church in Suwon, a city of over a million, south of Seoul. Serendipitously, Harold Buckingham was in Suwon as a soldier in the 50s! I will preach in that church on the 22<sup>nd</sup> (by the time you worship, we will be quite done; this time of year, Korea, which is all one time zone, is thirteen hours *ahead* of Hartford). I will be bringing gifts from our church that Robin, Nancy, and Jana have put together for me, and I expect I will be bringing gifts back. Korea is a big gift giving culture. By the way, each traveler pays their own airfare (I am using some of my continuing education funds to help), but the PROK pays all our expenses in country and we stay with host families. Quite an honor!
2. I think I also was invited because I have been to Korea before (with one of my children, not church-related) and, as parent to three Korean-born children, I have a familiarity and comfort with the culture and the food, if not, sadly, the language.
3. What really made me decide to take the time away from my family and you and spend the money to make this trip (and sit on a plane for 15 hours, twice), concerns my profoundly spiritual yearning to reach out as an American Christian ambassador of peace to my Korean kin in a time of war threats and deep conflict between this country and numerous parts of the world. As xenophobia rises here, as more and more racism comes out into the open, as I hear from friends who live elsewhere in the world that people in other countries wonder what has happened to the America that was once a beacon of democracy and generosity, I want to go to say that many, many of us still believe that all people are created in the image of God, and that peace and reconciliation are the highest goals for which we might aim. I go to a country that has heard talk of nuclear weapons being used by North Korea or the US, realizing that they would be the first casualties in any such war, given the huge number of American soldiers in S. Korea. The largest Korean city, Seoul, which is larger than New York City, sits 35 miles from the DMZ, where soldiers of both countries aim weapons at each other 24/7/365. I go to walk in solidarity with others who seek peace.

I feel extraordinarily lucky to be making this trip, and I ask for your prayers for our delegation and our hosts. I look forward to returning with stories and pictures, and I will attempt to post on Facebook and send Marie updates to pass on to you in other ways. Anyang! (Goodbye)

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse  
Transitional Pastor