



# MISSION CONNECTIONS

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Winter 2022



## Urban Industrial Mission

**Unzu Lee**  
*Mission co-worker serving in East Asia*

Dear friends,

Greetings to you from Korea! Here in Korea, we ushered in the new year of 2022 twice, the first one according to the solar calendar and the second one according to the lunar calendar. January 31 through February 2 was the official New Year holiday season in Korea. This means, I ate delicious 떡국 TWICE! 떡국 pronounced as teok-gook (t pronounced as a t in taco) is rice-cake soup that Koreans eat to welcome the New Year.

I have been in Korea almost a year. Due to the pandemic, I have not travelled outside of Korea although I am responsible for relating to PC (USA)'s partner entities in Hong Kong and North Korea. I remain in contact with the Hong Kong Council of Churches via email and am learning that the trend of emigration is continuing. As far as relating to the Korean Christian Federation (North Korea) is concerned, I have participated virtually in two informal meetings of the Ecumenical Forum for Korea (EFK) where concerns regarding North Korea were discussed. They were informal because EFK considers its meeting formal only when members of the Korean Christian Federation are present. I pray and hope that the U.S. government would soon lift up the ban on travel to North Korea it imposed on the U.S. citizens in 2017.

If I approached my life in Korea as a guest in somebody else's house last year, I am taking more initiatives in getting to know the people in this household. In the process, I am not only meeting Koreans but also U.S. Presbyterian missionaries of the past whose legacies continue to live on in Korea. My first such encounter was made with a

call from the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK), PC(USA)'s partner entity with whom I work most closely.

Rev. Shin who called me early May said, "We have nominated Rev. George Todd to receive a presidential award given to those who made contributions to democratization of Korea. Can you help us find his family member?" That was the first time I had heard of the Rev. George Todd, but I soon discovered that he was remembered by many Korean Christians as their dear friend. Upon learning that he left a mark in the area of urban industrial mission in Korea I contacted Rev. Trey Hammond who used to staff the Urban Ministry office in Louisville, and, to my utter surprise, he said, "I led his memorial service" and gave me the contact information for one of Rev. Todd's sons, John Todd. On June 10, 2021, the Korean government awarded Rev. Todd a Civil Merit Medal, and the medal was delivered to John.

Korea, my birth country, to which I returned after more than 50 years of sojourn is now touted as one of the most economically developed countries in the world. This was not the Korea I knew as a child. The open hostilities of the Korean War had stopped with the signing of the Armistice Treaty



자 마음치유프로그램(진정한 나를 찾아서)

**A circle of female laborers participating in a soul healing workshop called "In search of my authentic self." This event took place last year. YDP-UIM runs a lot of programs for empowerment of laborers and they include programs that help laborers become more whole.**

on July 27, 1953, but Korea was reeling from the trauma of the division and trying to survive under the debris of vast destruction caused by the war that killed 3 to 5 million people. Extreme poverty was visible everywhere. Beggars lined up in front of the churches on Sundays.

Korea, that had been about 80 percent agrarian, picked up industrialization as the way to move the country out of poverty. Into this context came two Presbyterian missionaries, Robert C. Urguhart (1954-) and the Rev. Henry Jones (1957-) who called Korean Christians to respond to the emerging needs of the people caught in the context of industrialization. Later in the 1960's, Rev. Todd helped the Yonsei University establish its Urban Industrial Research Center. In appreciation of the contributions made by these Presbyterians, the Yeongdeungpo Urban Industrial Mission (YDP-UIM) invited me to come and be a part of its worship and ribbon-cutting ceremony on the occasion of celebrating the completion of its building remodeling project on November 12, 2021, and with it started my education. Let me share what I have learned.

Yeongdeungpo, where the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) established its urban industrial mission center (initially called industrial evangelism) in 1958, sits on 9.5 square miles and was the first industrial complex of its kind was built in Korea. It quickly became an area inhabited by as many as 600,000 urban poor who were mostly made up of young people who were drawn from the rural areas to work in industry for meager wages. No matter how many hours they worked, they could not escape poverty. Furthermore, they were subjected to all forms of violence perpetrated by the industry that exacted labor from them without any accountability for violating the workers' human rights.

Started with a commitment to "follow the Liberator God in creating an industrial society of justice and peace," YDP-UIM drew a cadre of committed Christians willing to suffer with and for the workers. It soon changed its focus from evangelism to "protecting and promoting the political and economic interests of factory workers." Along with the workers, its staff members went to jail for doing God's mission.

Today nobody disputes the significant role that YDP-UIM has played in lifting up the workers and changing the landscape of worker-employer relations in the Korean industry. One speaker described the YDP-UIM as the space where workers could claim their humanity and breathe freely without fear at the time when Korea was ruled with an iron fist and repression. When I visited the YDP-UIM a week ago, Rev. Eunjung Son, the current Director of the YDP-UIM spoke about the changing landscape of the labor market and said that they are currently focusing on protecting the rights of the temporary workers and migrant workers. A serious concern is that many industries operate with impunity and laborers are forced to work in increasingly hazardous conditions that often cause death.

Industrialization did not eradicate poverty, and I appreciate that PC(USA) has made it very clear that the problem of poverty is systemic in its Matthew 25 initiative. I am committed to connecting with people and entities in Korea, Hong Kong, and North Korea that are working to eradicate systemic poverty. Every time we pray "Give us our daily bread" may we remember that the bread is to be shared by all. I covet your prayers for my faithful walk with God in doing God's mission for the poor. If you want to share your thoughts, please write to: [unzu.lee@pcusa.org](mailto:unzu.lee@pcusa.org).

Faithfully, Unzu

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