

The Importance of Community Life for North Korea

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“Jesus Abbey.” What does it mean? The English word “abbey” means a monastery, a community where men and women live together under vows to serve God and to enter into a deeper relationship with Him.

Many people think of Jesus Abbey as a prayer mountain or a retreat house or a training center. It is all these but much more—it is a place where people come together to live communally in order to grow closer to God, to learn the ways of love and cooperation, to demonstrate John 13:35, *By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.* It is also an attempt to recapture the spirit and love of the first Christian community in Jerusalem *where all those who had believed were together and had all things in common and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.* (Acts 2:44-45). The members of Jesus Abbey share their goods and live together in community out of love for God and one another. They also do it in obedience to a particular call from God to live this particular life. They know too that, without the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in each individual, the common life will not work. We fallen human beings are too selfish and sinful to share our goods and our lives freely without the power of God to enable us. At Jesus Abbey, they know that only God can make community work.

So, what does this have to do with North Korea? A great deal. The members live out and visitors experience that which the Communist ideology requires of everyone in society but finds it impossible to impose successfully. Communal living cannot be coerced—imposed by the State; it must be embraced freely in obedience to God.

As we work to prepare for the opening of North Korea, we need to understand all we can about the North Korean experience—what the life of ordinary people is like. We also need to be able to speak in terms that are mutually understood. Those who have had the experience of Christian communal life will have a very special word of understanding and hope to share with those who have suffered under atheistic Communism. Those who have no such experience will be at a disadvantage when discussing the ordinary experience of their North Korean brothers and sisters.

But there is more...

Perhaps the most effective strategy for bringing hope and salvation to the people of North Korea is for lovers of Christ to live out that love for Him and one another together, demonstrating its reality rather than speaking about it. There is an old English expression, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” I am sure that an actual living example is worth ten thousand words. Remember that Jesus said “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” How can our North Korean brothers and sisters understand the love of God and the truth of our words if they do not see love lived out among us? Those of us who have lived in community will be able to bring this blessed Christian community of love into the midst of the life of

ordinary people in the North. We can come as groups of ten or twelve or so, rehabilitate some old buildings, live together in community and share Jesus' love with the people in the area. We can care for their needs, teach new skills and, most importantly, show by our common life of love and worship, what it truly means to receive Christ's salvation and live as a member of His body. As people see and receive the love, they will be drawn to it. As they see Holy Spirit empowered worship and work, they will come to know the truth of the Gospel; they will know freedom as they have never known it before. They will become the Church.

Small groups of Christians living communally in North Korea serving the people around them will be, I believe, the most powerful evangelists and the ones to build a new Christian society in that dark, imprisoned land.

It was St. Francis of Assisi who is thought to have said, "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." This is the spirit of communal evangelism. Jesus Abbey is a laboratory and training ground to prepare for this most effective means to preach the Gospel.