

The Three Seas Center Story

It all began in 1999 when Fr. Archer Torrey and members of Jesus Abbey discovered that it might be possible to build a special educational center at the Abbey's Three Seas Ranch.

The Taebaek region, heavily dependent on coal mining, had gone into a steep economic decline when the coal mines closed down during the 1990s. To help this area, the National Assembly enacted the Closed Mines Region Economic Development Special Law. Under the terms of this new law, land owned by the Korean Ministry of Forests could be released to individuals and organizations to be used for development. Quite a few projects were planned for the area. The biggest and best-known is the Kangwon Land Resort.

The Three Seas Ranch was a tract of land that Jesus Abbey had been leasing from the Ministry of Forests for raising livestock. When Fr. Torrey and the Abbey learned about the new law they put together an application to build a youth training center there. They ran into a number of obstacles that prevented their application being received by the Ministry. When all else had failed, Fr. Torrey said that the only recourse left was to pray. As they prayed, they felt that God was promising that they would have the land to use for this purpose but no one could see how it might happen.

However, God had a plan... There was a woman who had recently come to the Abbey. She had read the biography of Fr. Torrey's father, Reuben Archer Torrey, Jr., who had cared for amputees in Korea in the '50s. On a visit to her mother's house in January 2000, she saw an article in the Chosun Ilbo newspaper about the newly installed Minister of Forests, Shin Soon-woo, who had lost his leg in 1954 while in middle school. The article explained how an American missionary had given him a new leg and self-confidence. The woman cut the article out of the paper and brought the clipping back to the Abbey. She thought that the missionary mentioned had to have been Fr. Torrey's father who himself was a right-arm amputee. This article led to a meeting between Fr. Torrey and Minister Shin Soon-woo who had not known who the missionary was or if he had any family. He was surprised to meet that missionary's son right in Korea. After a wonderful meeting, the Minister asked Fr. Torrey if there was anything that he might do for his work or for Jesus Abbey. Fr. Torrey told him about their efforts to apply for permission to build a training center on the land they were leasing from the Ministry. The Minister assured Fr. Torrey that their application would be reviewed.

That began a long process of applying to build the Three Seas Youth Training Center. A great number of people came forward to help. It would take too much space to list all of the people and organizations who helped in those early years and since then.

As plans were moving forward and the application to the Ministry of Forests was under review, tragedy struck. On May 19, 2002, at the end of a day of celebrating Jesus Abbey's birthday and the feast of Pentecost, Fr. Torrey slipped and fell, hitting his head on a hard bench. He was rushed to the hospital. Following surgery, he lapsed into a coma from which he never revived. Despite uncounted prayers being offered for his healing, he went home to be with the Lord on August 6th, 2002. During the months that passed between his fall and final passing, the Three Seas Center project came to a halt. At that point, no one knew how to proceed. A person was needed who would be able to take over responsibility for directing the process and eventually building the Center.

Fr. Torrey's son, Ben Torrey who was doing ministry in the United States and serving as administrator of a Christian middle and high school, was in Korea for Fr. Torrey's funeral. On the last night before returning to the U.S., a long-time friend of the Torreys and Jesus Abbey approached Ben asking him to deliver a message to his mother the next morning before he left. This person said that he had been meditating on the description of the Garden of Eden in Genesis Chapter 2 for quite some time. He pointed out that there was a river flowing from the Garden that divided into four rivers encompassing the world. He mentioned that at the Three Seas there were only three rivers. (The Three Seas is named for the point where the Han River, the Naktong River

and the Fifty Creeks watersheds all meet and from where the rain water flows to the three seas west, south and east of Korea.) When he said that, Ben responded immediately that there should be a fourth river. The friend said "Yes." Ben responded again that it was to be the River of Life flowing north to North Korea. This was the friend's message that he wanted shared with Mrs. Torrey; that the Three Seas was to be a place of ministry for North Korea, the source of the River of Life flowing to that land.

Ben shared this with his mother the next day and then returned to the United States not thinking much more about it. However, over the next two months through a remarkable series of events, the Lord made it quite clear to Ben and his wife, Liz, that He was calling them to return to Korea to prepare for the opening of North Korea and that the Three Seas Center was to be the location where this work was to be carried out. Ben conceived of The Fourth River Project as the work of preparation at the Three Seas. In February 2003, he made a trip to Korea to meet with his mother, Jane Torrey, and the members of Jesus Abbey to share his vision for preparation. The community, at that time, gave him responsibility for building the Three Seas Center.

Thus began the long process of gaining final permission from the Ministry of Forests to build the Three Seas Youth Training Center and to develop the Fourth River Project. Through the years, the Jesus Abbey community has lifted this work up in prayer on a daily basis. Many members have also been deeply involved with the work on a practical level.

As the process of gaining permissions from the Ministry of Forests, Gangwon Province and the City of Taebaek continued, the team of Abbey members and other volunteers living at the Three Seas Ranch pursued this work of preparing for the opening of North Korea. For a number of years, North Korea Schools and special Labor Schools were conducted at both the Jesus Abbey mother house and the Three Seas Ranch. These schools included people of all ages from around the country and overseas coming together with North Korean re-settlers for labor at the Ranch, lectures on North Korea missions, small group meetings, worship and prayer.

Many people have supported the Ranch and the construction of the Three Seas Center. Three new residential houses were built for the Ranch community. Finally, in 2015, with a ceremony to bless the land on October 31st, work began on the Three Seas Center itself. The foundations for this building that we are all enjoying today were laid then. The following spring construction began. Ben and Liz Torrey moved in in June 2017 with The River of Life School teachers following during summer vacation. Other team members moved in later on. Many finishing touches continued through the year. This beautiful new building, the fruit of untold prayers, the financial support of many people and churches along with the hard work of so many, is now being used as the headquarters of The Fourth River Project and the home of the team engaged in this work. It is the first step in the greater vision of a center that will provide new facilities for training and education, including, dormitory space, a library and research facilities relating to North Korea and the preparation for its opening. There will be space for lectures and seminars, , space for visiting scholars and experts to stay as well as meet together for discussion, and space for a variety of other activities. The Center will provide opportunities for people from both North and South Korea to come together and gain a deeper understanding of their different cultures and language. It will be a place for healing relationships broken by the history of this divided nation.

We are deeply grateful to God for bringing us this far and are confident that He will see this work through to completion.

We are also deeply grateful to the many, many hundreds, even thousands of people who have participated in this work, contributed to it, encouraged us and, especially, lifted it up in prayer throughout the many years that it has taken to come this far.