

Korean Missionary Hepatitis Meeting

By Paul C. Andrus, President of the Northern Far East Mission, 1955-1962.
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In January of 1956, I decided to send missionaries to Korea. I knew that the time was right for missionaries to go to Korea even though their living conditions would be harsh. Through the combined efforts of myself, President Ho Jik Kim, Colonel Robert Slover, Northern Far East Mission LDS Servicemen's Coordinator, and Colonel Willice Groves, President of the LDS Servicemen's Korean District, arrangements were made and the first missionaries, Elder Don Powell and Elder Richard Detton, arrived in Seoul on April 20, 1956. I continued to send missionaries to Korea regularly and quickly increased the number to twelve. For more details of sending missionaries to Korea, see my article, *Church Beginnings in Korea Part One*.

The most serious threat to the health of the missionaries in Korea proved to be hepatitis. In the spring of 1957, Elder Karl Fletcher who was laboring in Pusan came down with hepatitis and was hospitalized in Pusan for three weeks. The doctor recommended that Elder Fletcher return to the USA for treatment. I concurred and Elder Fletcher was honorably released and returned home on June 2, 1957. During the spring of 1958 Elder Robert Stout and Elder Wallace Bowman came down with hepatitis and the doctor recommended they return to the USA for treatment. I arranged for them to fly to Tokyo on July 9, 1958, and I placed them in the Catholic hospital in Tokyo. They both began to improve rapidly and in a few days were feeling very well. They continued to improve and were released from the hospital on August 8, 1958. Elder Stout finished his mission in Japan and Okinawa but Elder Bowman suffered a recurrence of hepatitis and was honorably released and returned home.

The number of missionaries in Korea with hepatitis continued to grow until five of the ten missionaries laboring there were afflicted. Hepatitis is a serious disease and can be life threatening. The first responsibility of every mission president is the well being of his missionaries so I was very concerned, especially since I was the one who had sent these missionaries to Korea in the first place. The full weight of the responsibility for the lives of these missionaries rested heavily on me and me alone and I felt this burden keenly.

Nevertheless, I knew that the Lord had inspired me to send the missionaries to Korea when I did. I knew that even though the living conditions in Korea were austere, the time was right for the missionaries to be in Korea and I knew that it was the will of the Lord that the missionaries remain in Korea. I further knew that whatever obstacles might arise, these obstacles could be overcome and that the work in Korea would go ahead. Accordingly I knew that this problem with hepatitis could be overcome and that it would be overcome. So in August, 1958, I made a special trip to Korea to meet with the missionaries to discuss this hepatitis problem with them.

From the time I was set apart as President of the Northern Far East Mission I was fully committed to sending missionaries to Korea and getting the church strongly established in Korea as soon as possible. The Lord had raised up President Ho Jik Kim to help the church get under way and the Lord had given me the responsibility of sending in the missionaries and building up the church working with President Kim. I was fully committed, and when I say that I was fully committed I

mean that I was completely dedicated with my whole heart, mind, body and soul. God knows how completely I was committed and God knows how diligently I worked to this end . I knew that the time was right for the missionaries to go into Korea and for the church to become strongly established in Korea because the Holy Ghost had so testified to me. I knew that all problems that stood in our way could be overcome and our efforts would succeed in Korea. I never had any intention whatsoever of taking the missionaries out of Korea and I never had any intention whatsoever of closing the Korean District. On the contrary my full intent was to overcome all problems and build up the church in Korea as rapidly as possible.

Nevertheless, I did not feel I had the right to ask any missionary to stay in Korea at the risk of his life if he did not want to do so of his own free will and choice. My purpose in going to Korea was to meet with those who had hepatitis and those who were running the risk of getting hepatitis to find out how they themselves felt, to discuss ways of overcoming this hepatitis problem, and to give each missionary the opportunity to leave Korea if he wanted to leave.

I called a meeting of all the missionaries then laboring in Korea and my recollection is that we met in the upstairs meeting hall at the Yurak Dong property in Seoul. Unfortunately I did not record in my journal the names of the missionaries who were in attendance, but I believe those in attendance were Elder Dean Andersen, Elder Newell Kimball, Elder Claude Newman, Elder David Strebe, Elder Vearl Taylor, Elder Lowell Brown, Elder Gene Till, Elder Ray Hawkins, Elder Rulon Porter, and Elder Cline Campbell.

At the beginning of the meeting I spoke of the love their own parents had for each of them. I spoke of the love and concern for their well being The First Presidency had for them. I spoke of the love and concern for their well being which I personally felt. I spoke of the serious, life-threatening nature of hepatitis and of the possibility that even more of them would come down with this disease. Even though I was fully resolved to keep the missionaries in Korea unless they themselves decided to leave, I did say that one option in dealing with this problem was to take them out of Korea. The other option was to leave them in Korea with the faith that The Lord would help them overcome this disease. And then I asked each one of them to tell me how they felt about this serious problem and what they felt we should do about this problem.

Each and every missionary responded and frankly and openly expressed the feelings of their hearts. Each and every one of them spoke of their great joy in bringing the gospel to their Korean brothers and sisters. Each and every one of them spoke of their conviction that they had been called by the Lord to serve in Korea at this time. Each and every one of them spoke of their great desire to remain in Korea and complete their missions there. Each and every one of them spoke of their faith in the Lord and their trust in the Lord to take care of them. Each and every one of them declared they were willing to die in Korea and, if it was the will of the Lord that they die in his service in Korea, there was no better place to die. And as each and every one so spoke he wept openly and freely. As each and every missionary so spoke and so wept, each of us in the room also wept openly and freely. These were not tears of pain or of sorrow. These were tears of unspeakable joy. These were not a few tears shed at the end of the meeting. These were tears profusely shed throughout this sacred meeting from beginning to end. And as we felt this unspeakable joy our hearts were knit together in holy love for each other and for our Lord and Master. No one who was in that

meeting will ever forget the feelings we all felt there.

The outcome of this meeting came as no surprise to me. Under the inspiration of the Lord I had handpicked each of these missionaries to labor in Korea and I had full confidence in their devotion and their faithfulness. In anticipation of the outcome of this meeting and prior to this meeting, I had turned to D&C 103:27-28 and read again those inspiring words of the Lord. After each missionary had spoken I spoke, and as I spoke I continued to weep and all of us continued to weep together. I said I felt the same as they felt. I said that I knew they had all been called by the Lord to serve in Korea. I said I knew that the Lord wanted them in Korea and that he wanted them to stay in Korea, even at the peril of their lives. And then I read D&C 103:27-28. "Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again. And whoso is not willing to lay down his life for my sake is not my disciple."

As this meeting, made sacred by the presence of the Spirit of the Lord and by the holy feelings of unspeakable joy we all felt, drew to a close, our hearts were all united as one. Every one of us rejoiced in the knowledge that all of the missionaries would remain in Korea and the holy work of bringing the gospel to our Korean brothers and sisters would go on without interruption.