

Rural Evangelism in North Chulla

Rural evangelism is the major assignment of six men in the Presbyterian Mission U.S. (Southern), and of several others part-time. R.K. Robinson serves in South Choongchung, Hugh and Dwight Linton in Soonchun and Kwangju, Kenneth Boyer in Cheju-do, John Folta and Joe Hopper in North Chulla. Each has his own emphases and individual concerns and approaches, but all have the common objective of strengthening the Kingdom of God in rural areas through the planting and development of churches and the training of local leadership.

R.K. Robinson has concentrated on lay leadership training, spending most of his time holding training schools in outlying centers. Kenneth Boyer travels regularly from Kwangju to Cheju, working among the churches of the island but concentrating now on a center in the city of Cheju. Here work among students, lay-leadership training, and a public health clinic combine to strengthen the church on the island. Hugh and Dwight Linton, under the name "Operation Lighthouse" have developed a unique system covering a huge coastal area and the islands of the sea. Feeling that church development in Soonchun and Chun-nam Presbyteries where they live can be cared for by local Korean leadership, they are now concentrating on Chinju Presbytery (Kyungsang Namdo) and Mokpo Presbytery. Their report covering the period from the spring of 1971 to the fall of 1972 shows 17 churches begun in the Chinju area and 25 in the Mokpo area. John Folta and Joe Hopper divide North Chulla between themselves, travelling regularly to the remote areas in the mountains and along the coast to serve as assigned by Presbytery.

This article will especially describe the work of the Hoppers, since it is most familiar to us. During the past 25 years I have worked in all parts of North Chulla, and there are very few churches where I have not visited. For many years my pattern was to travel with a Korean assistant, spending three or four days visiting churches to encourage the local lay-evangelist, help straighten out local problems, hold examinations for those joining the church, preach and hold the sacraments. Often this involved working indirectly with other churches nearby as well as those officially assigned to me by Presbytery. During the period of post-war rehabilitation and times of church strife, the presence of the missionary brought comfort and encouragement to these distant points and helped contribute to steady growth over the years. 25 years ago there were about 200 Presbyterian churches in North Chulla. Now there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 750. In the earlier days, travel was far more difficult than now, roads nearly impassable, food terrible, and there were other uncomfortable conditions. All this has dramatically improved. I have not been stuck in a mud hole for a long time! At least two-thirds of the rural churches have electricity. Food is immensely improved.

For six years my wife and I have carried on this rural work together. When our youngest daughter left for boarding school, Dot was free to do this work with me. We acquired a small travel trailer which has been towed behind the Land Rover over roads far exceeding the wildest nightmares of its South Carolina manufacturers, but we have kept it nailed and bolted together while using it regularly as our bedroom on wheels. Except for breakfast, we eat almost all meals with Korean villagers, and in fact spend most of our time away from the trailer. Initially it was an object

of great curiosity, and hundreds of children crowded around, but now it has become a routinely accepted visitor from outer space. The most excitement is caused when the dishwater is emptied down the drain and gurgles out the hose below the trailer...possibly indicating that most of the children have never seen water coming out of a pipe before. The trailer is covered with scratched names of children and places and comments about the Americans, but we have never had a break-in of any kind, nor been molested at night.

To the best of my knowledge we are the only man and wife team in rural evangelism of this type. Our routine is to leave Saturday morning, visiting one church that day and two the next, and returning home Monday. We try to spend all afternoon each day visiting from house to house with the local evangelist. We try to concentrate on non-Christian homes, or those where there is some prospect of leading people to Christ. We carry an abundance of tracts and gospel portions to distribute. Having Dot along is a decided asset, not only because of what she can do directly with the women and children but also because it is easier for the group of us to visit in homes where the man is absent. Sometimes, particularly on rainy days, it is easy to catch whole families at home. At other times they are all in the fields or gathered at ^{places} to thrash grain. In such cases we can often speak to a large group of men or women at once, distribute literature, and invite them to the evening service. In recent months, the "new village" movement has brought together scores of villagers to work on projects such as road building and we have had unusually good opportunities to talk to men who are often difficult to find. Such visiting also takes us to the homes of sick people ^{or the aged} who cannot go out to church and who deeply appreciate our coming to them. No count has been possible of the number of separate villages and homes we have entered, but we believe the effort is well worth the time and trouble.

Before the evening service, while I am examining candidates for the catechumen class or for baptism, Dot and my assistant hold a meeting for the children. Using pictures or flannel graphs she tells Bible Stories to the hundreds who pack into the little churches. When I see them surging out of the church afterwards, I am reminded of the circus trick I saw years ago where endless numbers of clowns kept climbing out of the same old broken-down Ford automobile, ~~gm~~ but when packed into the church they are best described in the Korean way as looking like a pot of bean-sprouts. Meanwhile, I hold the examinations which presumably is reaping the crop which the local evangelist has tended. Sometimes he has not done his job well and the examination is a teaching session as well, and takes a very long time. My records show that I have held about 7500 examinations in 25 years. Knowing the many hours it takes I question the reports of Francis Xavier baptizing prodigious numbers in a short time, unless it was without preparation and examination. During the evening service I preach and hold the sacraments. Often services do not begin until very late, perhaps nine o'clock or later, so we are tired when we drag back to the trailer. After before retiring Dot gives a "sightsee" to the women and "kun-aggies" who crowd around to see our home. Many a "hal-mun-nie" alights announcing that she has been to America and back!

Some people might question the further need for this kind of work, since Korean pastors could do it. That is true, but the fact of the matter is that many of them will not, or that these areas are still so difficult to

reach that only the missionary has the time and means to get there. Furthermore the missionary helps keep the concern of the Korean Church focused on these neglected areas where tens of thousands are waiting for the Good News. Superintending a few of these churches in remote areas serves as pegs upon which to hang the whole fabric of a missionary's concern for and identification with the Korean Church, because basically they become the point of contact with the problems and needs and development of whole areas which need to be evangelized.

The Koreans have a word "Kwang-sim." (관심). The dictionary defines this word as "interest" or "concern" but it packs far more meaning than that. I believe that an effective missionary, no matter what his particular profession, must have "kwan-sim" with the people and the churches and the nation he is to serve. "Kwan-sim" includes the whole inter-personal relationship of sympathy and identification and mutual esteem which can be built up between two parties. No matter how perfect a missionary is professionally, or how expert at the language, or eloquent as a preacher, if he never establishes "kwan-sim" with anybody he is never a real missionary. The rural evangelist is in a wonderful position to establish "kwan-sim" with vast areas and hundreds of churches and Christians. He can become a part of the vast movement of this nation in coming to Christ. He shares its struggles and problems and weaknesses, and indulges in its triumphs and thrills. Every missionary in any position can be a part of this nation's Christian development in this way, but no one has a better opportunity than the itinerant rural evangelist!