

"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

— Matthew 13: 31-32

# M u s t a r d Seeds

Fall 2003

*Eight people from Jesus Village Church were baptized this summer. They were the first baptisms in a church that identifies itself as an Anabaptist community in Korea's maze of Confucian, Buddhist, shamanist and Christian communities. Baptismal candidates ranged in age from 16 to 48, each with a powerful testimony of a life changed through Jesus Christ*



**I**n a country renowned for its exquisite cuisine and megachurches, there is still hunger — spiritual hunger.

South Korean Christians are hungry for relevance, renewal, faithfulness and transformed lives.

That hunger was evident in the enthusiastic welcome Mennonite Mission educators Alan and Eleanor Kreider received when they traveled to South Korea this spring speaking in churches, universities and seminaries.

The Kriders spoke to cumulative audiences of 3,500 people and attracted the attention of the national media as they taught in six major South Korean cities, giving 33 presentations in a three-week period.

One professor emeritus was so moved by the Kriders' presentation that he stayed up all night reading church history books to find out more about the early Anabaptist church and its martyrs.

He expressed regret at not having heard about the Anabaptists earlier in his life.

"We observed Anabaptism functioning in Korea as it does elsewhere in the world, as a 'sectarian' Christian tradition that provides a surprising place of ecumenical meeting. It gave us joy to see this," Alan Kreider said.

In South Korea, as in other countries where denominations proliferate, Mennonite Mission Network has chosen to work at church unity rather than to plant Mennonite churches.

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The fighting in Iraq heightened interest in thinking about war in a broader context, Kreider said.

"Previously all discussions on war were apparently dominated by the ongoing threat of war between the two Koreas.

"The standoff with North Korea had become increasingly tension-filled in the weeks prior to our arrival. South Koreans long for reunion with their relatives in the north; but they feel threatened by North Korean conventional weaponry — its artillery

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could destroy Seoul — to say nothing of its potential nuclear arsenal.”

The peace church seems a very new idea in South Korea, he said.

“The Jesus Village Church people have been challenged by our seeing peace in a much broader framework than politics and war; [we also emphasized] peace-making within congregations, families, schools and workplaces,” Kreider said.

During the first two weeks, the Korea Anabaptist Center hosted the Kreiders. They spent the third week with the Jesus Village Church in Chun Chon, three hours northeast of Seoul near the demilitarized zone. This congregation, an alternative to the institutionalized megachurches of South Korea, strives to rediscover the

vibrancy of the early church and to take discipleship seriously.

The Korea Anabaptist Center — created in 2001 to promote discipleship, the training of Christian leaders and peace-building — has already made a significant impact in South Korea.

Alan and Eleanor Kreider worked in the United Kingdom for more than 25 years with Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor of Mennonite Mission Network. Their experience in helping to organize the London Mennonite Centre and establish a network of Anabaptists throughout the United Kingdom made them useful resource people to the developing Korea Anabaptist Center.

— Lynda Hollinger-Janzen

## A note from Sheldon Sawatzky

I have spoken with Felix Manz, Georg Blaurock, and Conrad Grebel, early leaders of the Anabaptist reformation — except their names and faces were Korean.

When I first met the leaders of the nascent Anabaptist movement in Korea in 1997, I felt transported back to 16th-century Switzerland as I caught the excitement of discovering the meaning of the biblical nature of the church. These leaders — university professors and a pastor — had delved into Bible texts and read 70 books on the nature of the church, coming to embrace views on the church that aligned with Anabaptism.

Out of that study group emerged the Jesus Village Church, an alternative to the traditional, hierarchical Korean churches. Thus was born the plan to found an Anabaptist center that would produce resources and networking opportunities for Koreans who are also seeking a new form for the church. In a few short years, this network has grown to more than 400 Koreans, with the ministry of the Korea Anabaptist Center expanding at a breathtaking pace.

With a staff of two Koreans and two mission workers, the center has published several books on Anabaptist themes. It conducts a peace-building course, discussion groups, seminars and exchange programs. The center sponsored a young Korean woman, Yoo Eun-ha, on her mission of peace in Iraq before and during the U.S. invasion.

The Jesus Village Church recently performed its first baptism, and is now an associate member of Mennonite World Conference. The church has established an alternative school for its children, called the V-School.

Your contribution for the work of the Korea Anabaptist Center and Jesus Village Church will enable these flourishing ministries to continue to thrive. Your prayers for these ministries and generous giving are deeply appreciated.



*Sheldon Sawatzky*

Mennonite Mission Network Asia director

## Project Update

**Spring 2003:** Mennonite workers participate in efforts to stem tide of AIDS. Contributions for the work in South Africa totaled \$16,640. The average gift was \$168.19.

**Mennonite Mission Network** is committed to continuing many of the ministries of the former General Conference Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church mission agencies (CHM, COM, and MBM). At the same time, we are working to help the missional church focus on new ways of being in mission ... both across the street *and* around the world.

## Mustard Seeds

is a publication of Mennonite Mission Network for mission partners who provide regular support for four projects each year. Each quarter a new project is featured, highlighting one of the various holistic ministries of the Mission Network. From peacemaking ministries in Ireland/Northern Ireland, to urban ministries in North America, to church planting in Macaõ, *Mustard Seeds* provides an insight into the Mennonite Church USA's growing missional movement. Designated donations go to support these specific Mission Network projects.