

**News and Current Events :: Aid Group to Set Up Church in North Korea****Aid Group to Set Up Church in North Korea - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2004/10/11 20:56**

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A relief agency, in cooperation with eight mission organizations, is making plans to establish a church exclusively for foreigners in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang.

According to the South Korea-based Korea Times newspaper, the Korean World Aid Foundation, a group working to provide aid for North Koreans, said Friday that it has made agreements with eight U.S.-based missions groups to join hands in establishing the church for foreigners in Pyongyang.

If North Korea grants permission to its foundation, the church, tentatively called the "Pyongyang International Harvest Church," will be the third official Protestant church in there.

"The representatives of the joint team will soon visit Pyongyang to seek the government's permission for the church," said Lee Soo-jung, a member of the foundation.

According to the plan, a total of \$6 million will be invested to construct a four-story building with lodging facilities. The church will also run a school for foreign students, the foundation said.

When opened, foreign visitors and diplomats will be able to attend English services in Pyongyang, the Korea Times reported. Mission groups participating in the plan include the Campus Crusade for Christ and the Love Network for Korea in Los Angeles.

Although the North Korean Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," in practice the Government severely restricts religious freedom, sources say, including discouraging organized religious activity except that controlled by officially recognized groups.

Foreign religious activity frequently is connected with humanitarian relief, and overseas religious relief organizations have been active in responding to the country's food crisis.

There are, however, two Protestant churches in Pyongyang, Pongsu Church and Chilgol Church, that were opened in 1988 and 1999, respectively, and a Roman Catholic Church. But sources say these churches are tightly controlled by the State.

In September 2003, construction reportedly was completed of the Pyongyang Theological Academy, a graduate institution that trains pastors and evangelists. In addition there were reports that the Russian Orthodox Church was building a church in Pyongyang.

In addition, the Government claims that there are more than 500 authorized "house churches." Although some visitors accept this estimate, the regime has not allowed outsiders the access necessary to confirm such claims. Likewise, outsiders have limited ability to ascertain the level of government control over these groups, but it is generally assumed they are monitored closely.