

REPORT: RENUNCIATION OF CLAIMS TO FORMER MISSION PROPERTY IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Origin: The General Secretary, General Council

The United Church of Canada's relationship with the people of Korea dates from 1898 when the first missionaries from The Presbyterian Church in Canada arrived in Wonsan, in what is now North Korea, and established what became known as the "Canadian Mission". For some 125 years, through all the trials and tribulations suffered by the Korean people — colonial occupation by Japan, division of the peninsula into north and south, the Korean War, and military dictatorship—the United Church has engaged with partners in Korea in God's Mission of abundant life for all. The relationship has grown and flourished, to the mutual benefit of many in Korea and Canada. Since the emergence of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) in 1953, the relationship between the United Church and PROK has been one of deep partnership, that was particularly strengthened during the struggle for democracy and human rights in South Korea in the 1970's and '80's. The partnership continues to be a treasured one, that continues to develop, as can be seen in the historic 2015 agreement related to the mutual recognition of ministries.

The division of the Korean Peninsula and its consequences is a central, shared preoccupation in the United Church's relationship with Korean partners. Following the surrender of Japan to the allies in August of 1945, Korea was arbitrarily divided into Soviet and American zones of occupation along the 38th parallel. By 1948 this had led to the establishment of two hostile regimes, the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north. During the ensuing Korean War (1950-53), both sides attempted the forced re-unification of the peninsula by military means, resulting in horrendous suffering. A ceasefire was negotiated in 1953, and an armistice signed without a formal peace treaty, the Korean War has not ended, some 70 years later.

The continuing division of the Korean Peninsula and accompanying context of instability and militarization is a concern that is both Koreans and global. In the face of brokenness and hostility, the PROK has committed itself to pursuing justice and peace, reconciliation and reunification, and taken upon itself a special mission within South Korean society of challenging Korean society to think differently about the future to which God calls. At its 106th General Assembly in 2021, the PROK passed "*A Declaration Regarding the Renunciation of Claims to Property Left in the North for the Sake of Reconciliation between South and North Korea*" also known as "Resolution 6-9," (See Appendix I). This Declaration was affirmed at the PROK's 107th General Assembly in 2022, in "Resolution 6-13".

Key to understanding the background to this Declaration lies in the political culture in South Korea. Following the division of the peninsula, and especially during the Korean War, millions of Koreans were forced to flee southward from what is now the DPRK. There are many in South Korea, descendants of those with former family and other ties to the North, and many others, who advocate and press for the political collapse of North Korean regime. Anticipation of that day comes with the desire by some to reclaim properties that had been left behind when they were forced to flee the North during the conflict of war. The PROK's 2021 *Declaration* also responds to the practice of many Christian denominations and

independent churches in South Korea to mobilize resources to prepare for an aggressive “re-evangelization” of North Korea. Meanwhile, the rigid division of the peninsula continues, with heightened political and military tensions between the two sides, with no resolution in sight. In this environment of stalemate, powerlessness and hostility, the PROK seeks to shift the social, political and faith-based narrative towards one of reconciliation. It is hard for many non-Koreans to appreciate the difficulty of this challenge given sharp debate within south Korea and specifically within the Korean Christian churches about the nature of the division. How can God’s transformative Word of abundant life for all be spoken into this context? In “*A Declaration Regarding the Renunciation of Claims to Property Left in the North for the Sake of Reconciliation between South and North Korea*,” the PROK sees a powerful opportunity to take a symbolic step towards reconciliation on the Korean peninsula.

Given that The United Church of Canada at one time owned a number of mission properties in what is now the DPRK, the PROK has invited the United Church to join in making a similarly powerful symbolic witness for reconciliation by renouncing all claims to former United Church-related property in what is now North Korea. This report provides background to this invitation and recommendations for General Council, including a suggestion that the United Church’s response be framed in terms of the 1974 actions of the PROK and The United Church of Canada. This report has four parts, and three appendices:

Part I: The Declaration Adopted by the PROK General Assembly in 2021

Part II: United Church Properties Held in Korea in 1942

Part III: 1974 Actions by PROK and The United Church of Canada

Part IV: How the United Church might respond

Appendices:

- I. Resolution 6-9 from the 106th General Assembly of the PROK: “남북 화해를 위한 북녘에 두고 온 재산권리 포기 선언문 채택” (“Adoption of a Declaration Regarding the Renunciation of Claims to Property Left in the North for the Sake of Reconciliation between South and North Korea”) - Korean original, with unofficial English translation
- II. A list of property belonging to The United Church of Canada in Korea in 1942: “Summary of Property in Korea -- with values, The United Church of Canada, Korea Mission”
- III. “Joint Statement of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the Division of World Outreach of The United Church of Canada, 1974”

Part I: The Declaration Adopted by the PROK General Assembly in 2021

For two years previous to the 106th General Assembly in 2021, the PROK’s Peace and Reunification Committee worked to develop a statement regarding the renunciation of claims to property that had been held in the North by those who had fled south at the time of the Korean War. The committee recognized that one stumbling block towards reunification of North and South, when it comes, will be the issue of claims to property held before the Korean War. It was decided that addressing this question pre-emptively would be the desirable course of action.

The PROK's 2021 Declaration is a symbolic act, expressing the giving up or renunciation of ownership of property as one grounded within the biblical tradition of jubilee, as part of a confession of the faith of the church. The PROK understands itself called to work for national reconciliation and peaceful reunification in Korea in response to God's guidance as expressed in jubilee faith. As the statement says, "the first instruction given to the people of the wilderness who would escape slavery and live as new people was the declaration that 'the whole world/earth (*Eretz*) belongs to God' (Ex. 19:5)" and "The land is mine. You are just travellers, temporary residents who come and live with me." (Lev. 25:23). The Declaration also observes, "the biblical idea of jubilee should be a blueprint not only for the Israelite community to build a new society, but also a confession of all who work for a peaceful future on the Korean peninsula in accordance with God's will."

The Declaration consists primarily of two actions. It calls for the renunciation of claims to ownership of property left behind in the North as a concrete step towards reconciliation, and it calls upon the churches in South Korea to curtail their plans for what it describes as "imperialistic" mission of North Korean society. Since the time of the Korean war, many church denominations in South Korea have drawn up plans for aggressive re-evangelization of the North. The Declaration calls upon the churches in South Korea to turn away from the power-expanding, unilateral "North Korean missionary policy" advocated by separate denominations, and instead "unite in turning toward the path of reconciliation and cooperation, so that Koreans of both South and North Korea can rejoice and laugh together in new and creative ways."

Recognizing that since the time of the division of the peninsula into South and North, land has come to be organized and managed according to two different legal systems, the Declaration points out that one of the problems with "reclaiming one's property rights according to South Korea's legal system of private ownership" is that it "ignores North Korea's legal system, which prohibits private land ownership in which land is treated as the common property of the people," forcing South Korean understandings to prevail. As the Declaration observes, "This is a major obstacle in opening up a new path to reconciliation beyond the 70 years of division and in seeking peace and prosperity."

Finally, the Declaration ends with a general invitation by saying:

In order to leave behind the confrontation, conflict, and hatred that has spanned more than half a century of our history, and to reveal the future of true reconciliation and peace, we are here and now making a "declaration regarding the renunciation of claims to property left in the North." We invite everyone who wants peace and unification in this land to participate.

Part II: United Church Properties Held in Korea in 1942

Details of the Properties Owned by The United Church of Canada

Before the War in the Pacific broke out in December of 1941, The United Church of Canada operated several mission stations in North Hamkyung province and South Hamkyung province in what is now the DPRK. These were located at Wonsan, Hamheung, Sungjin, and Hoiryung.

Summary of United Church of Canada Korea Mission Property -- with values¹:

| location | # of plots | land in pyung (= 3.31 m ²) | value in yen ² | # of buildings | value in yen |
|--------------|------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Seoul | 1 | 1,260 | 126,000 | 2 | 42,700 |
| Wonsan | 24 | 6,738 | 255,453 | 21 | 255,128 |
| Hamheung | 29 | 23,707 | 873,647 | 43 | 1,058,518 |
| Sungjin | 35 | 12,913 | 247,791 | 15 | 215,116 |
| Hoiryung | 14 | 15,081 | 153,340 | 14 | 186,827 |
| total | 103 | 59,699 | 1,656,231 | 95 | 1,758,339 |

At each of these stations the United Church owned considerable property, consisting of both land and buildings—hospitals, schools, dormitories, Bible institutes, and missionary residences. The properties summarized in the table above had been accumulated during more than forty years of mission activity in Korea, many of them transferred to the United Church at the time church union in 1925, formerly properties of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. (There was also a United Church mission station among Koreans at Lungchingtsun in Manchuria, North Gando province, which for purposes of this report will not be included since it is outside the Korean Peninsula.)

The Interim Committee

It is important to keep in mind that in the early 1940s all of Korea was occupied under Japanese rule. Korea was formally annexed into the Empire of Japan in 1910 and was not liberated until the surrender of Japan in August of 1945. The Japanese occupation of Korea — like most occupations — was a brutal one. It focussed on subjugation of the Korean people and nation, and extraction of resources for Imperial Japan. As war loomed in 1940, The United Church of Canada began to evacuate all its mission personnel, starting with the wives and children. By March of 1941, only four missionaries remained: Florence Murray, Beulah Bournes, William Scott, and E.J.O. Fraser. These four served as the “Interim Committee” of the Korea Mission of The United Church of Canada. As William Scott records in his memoirs, behind the decision to remain “was the hope that the presence of a few missionary friends would be an encouragement to the Korean church, would soften the shock of almost complete withdrawal, would enable them to give some supervision to the work, and provide a liaison with the Japanese authorities in matters relating to mission work and property.”³ Fraser, as Mission treasurer, was tasked with putting all the records in order, in preparation for whatever lay ahead.

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbour on Dec. 8, 1942, the four United Church

¹ See appendix II: “Summary of Property in Korea - with values, The United Church of Canada, Korea Mission.” (United Church of Canada Archives, United Church of Canada Board of World Missions Fonds, F503, series 13, Korea, 83.011C, Box 16-26) This document seems to have been produced in early 1946 for the purpose of reclaiming possession of the properties from the Japanese government or whomever had gained possession in the meantime. It is not based on first-hand knowledge of the situation in Korea in 1946 but seems to derive from legal title to the properties at the point of departure in 1942.

² Note that that these figures are in Japanese yen, the currency of the occupier. Before the outbreak of the Pacific War, one Japanese yen was worth about 0.23 American dollars. The total holdings in land (1,656,231 yen) and buildings (1,758,339 yen) would therefore have been equivalent to about US\$ 785,351.10, which would be worth about US\$ 17,140,033.00 today.

³ William Scott, *Canadians in Korea: A Brief Historical Sketch of Canadian Mission in Korea*, 1975, 139.

missionaries were placed under house arrest by the occupying Japanese authorities. At the beginning of April 1942, they learned that they would be repatriated as prisoners of war in accordance with a negotiated settlement allowing Canadian and American internees to be released. Scott remembers that this announcement “was followed by a hectic preparation of reports on property, application for the appointment of a custodian, storing of furniture and packing of suitcases.”⁴ He specifically mentions that they were allowed to take along only as much as they could personally carry, “with all printed matter, photographs and written or typed material forbidden.” They departed at the end of May 1942.

The United Church of Canada Yearbook of 1943 reports that as the last four missionaries left, “By arrangement with the Japanese authorities the Mission property and all contents were handed over to the custody of the holding body ([known by the Japanese name of] “*Zaidan Hojin*”) of the three Korean Presbyteries of our field.”⁵ As the missionaries were not allowed to take documents when they departed (except for audited financial statements up to the end of 1941), they prepared a final report, which they completed on their journey home, dated, “*M.S. Gripsholm*, Equatorial Atlantic Ocean, August 15, 1942,” and titled, “Report of the Interim Committee of the Korea Mission of The United Church of Canada.”⁶ The 1943 *Yearbook* mentions this report, commenting that it “**will prove valuable as a record and helpful when resumption of missionary work becomes possible after the war’s end.**”⁷

In this report the committee members provide a sketch of the important events of the previous year and a half, and recounts the difficult decisions that the committee had to make specifically with regard to property:

*Perhaps the most burdensome task which faced us during this period and the one which caused us most anxious thought and searching of heart was that which related to the administration of Mission property. Our main concern was to conserve the fruits of long years of devoted Christian service in all sections of the work, and at the same time to safeguard the property for its original purpose, namely, the use of such property by the Christian forces for the extension of the Kingdom of God in Korea.*⁸

Their primary concern was to figure out ways to allow the mission work in Korea to continue in the absence of mission personnel and funding from overseas. To accomplish this, the Interim Committee seems to have considered various strategies:

- turn over ownership of the various properties to the Korean church;
- sell property to ensure that there would be a source of funding into the future;
- entrust the remaining properties into the hands of a “custodian” (i.e. trustee), retaining the title to the property with The United Church of Canada, but empowering the custodian to manage as necessary.

⁴ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 145.

⁵ *United Church of Canada Yearbook and Directory*, Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1943, 121.

⁶ “Report of the Interim Committee of the Korea Mission of The United Church of Canada,” full report (United Church of Canada Archives, United Church of Canada Board of Overseas Missions Fonds, F502, series 6, Korea, 83.006C, Box 5-128.)

⁷ *United Church of Canada Yearbook*, 1943, 121.

⁸ “Report of the Interim Committee,” 13.

This last strategy—of naming an entity to act as custodian or trustee—seemed the wisest approach in the face of the Japanese authorities’ desire to take possession of the properties for the war effort and the kind of pressure that they could exert on local Korean leadership. Retaining ownership through a “custodian” was seen as providing a degree of protection from this pressure. The committee carefully reports that “our final decisions were made only after long and prayerful deliberation and in consultation with our Korean fellow workers.”⁹

Appointment of the Custodian

The most important activities of the final two months before the departure of these last four missionaries focussed on ensuring that all the legal requirements under Japanese law were put in place regarding the appointment of a custodian (i.e. the trustee). As the committee report describes, “this involved the making of detailed lists of all articles of furniture in the houses, as well as lists of all the real estate belonging to the Mission.”¹⁰ A contract was signed with the custodian on April 16, 1942, and the report states that “before we left we had the satisfaction of knowing definitely that the [occupying Japanese] Government-General had gazetted the appointment of the *Zaidan Hojin* of the Three Hamkyung Presbyteries as the official custodian of all property of the Mission and also of our personal property.”¹¹

As no copies of this contract ever left Korea, the report provides an official summary of what the contract contained, outlining the decisions made by the Interim Committee with regard to each property, laying down the intentions and expectations of the Korea Mission of The United Church of Canada regarding the management of the property under various possible scenarios. The report further notes that the Three-Presbytery *Zaidan Hojin* was given Power of Attorney “to carry out any or all of the above actions.”¹²

Finally, the report ends on a sombre but hopeful note:

*This report brings to a close another chapter in the history of our Korean Mission. We have left behind us a church and affiliated institutions into whose building went much devoted work over a long period of years. That church and those institutions still carry on and we trust His word “that the gates of hell shall not prevail” against them. We left behind us, at their helm, a body of earnest and able Christian men and women, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who have shown remarkable patience and devotion under most trying circumstances. It is quite probable that a harder lot remains for them now that we missionaries have been completely withdrawn. May we bespeak for them, as they themselves begged of us, our continued cooperation among the unseen forces, on that battleground where we wrestle not with flesh and blood but with the powers of evil. For they, with us, believe that the battle which is being joined today is ultimately a battle of right against wrong, of the powers of light against the powers of darkness. And they are confident, as we are, that though the future is unknown, it is in the hands of God.*¹³

⁹ “Report of the Interim Committee,” 13.

¹⁰ “Report of the Interim Committee,” 16.

¹¹ “Report of the Interim Committee,” 16.

¹² “Report of the Interim Committee,” 18.

¹³ “Report of the Interim Committee,” 19.

Although the war and Japan's occupation of Korea had forced The United Church of Canada to withdraw from Korea, it is clear from these comments that the missionaries did not see the Korea mission as ended. The institutions that they had helped to put into place over forty-four years of mission were now equipped with the human and financial resources to continue that mission in Korea, as much as possible under the difficult circumstances. The missionaries' primary concern was for the well-being of the Korean church now entrusted with all responsibility for that mission, and which they knew would face difficult times ahead.

Subsequent History of the Properties

The report describes the situation at the point of the missionaries' departure in 1942. During the remainder of WWII there was no contact, and as it happened, the missionaries were never able to return to the former mission field.

Three months after the surrender of Japan in August 1945, Rev. Chairin Moon, pastor in Lungchingsun in Manchuria, and custodian of the mission properties owned by the United Church in Lungchingsun, was able to get a letter through to the headquarters of The United Church of Canada in November 1945.¹⁴ He reports on the situation in Lungchingsun, but also shares what he knows about the situation of the properties in the Hamkyung provinces:

The buildings of Hoyryung and Sungjin are kept alright, but there is not anything left in them. . . . At Hamheung and Wonsan the Japanese officers treated the property of Mission as the property of enemy and sold some of them out. But the price still kept in the Bank and yet the government bought them. Therefore we can get them back without any trouble. . . . The schools are carried on as usually in Korea. But the Bible Institution was closed two, three years ago. Mr. Cho and Mr. Lee the teachers of the same were captured for a while until one month ago.

In June of 1946, Fraser returned to Korea, the first Canadian missionary to return. Part of his work was to find out what had happened to the various properties. Although he was not able to travel to the zone of Soviet occupation, he was able to communicate with first hand witnesses who had come down from the north. Several months later, Fraser and Scott, who had now also returned to Korea, wrote a letter to the former members of the Korea Mission (letter dated January 4, 1947) outlining the condition of the former properties of the Canadian Mission at the various stations.¹⁵ With regard to Seoul, they report that the mission residence had been occupied by the Japanese colonial government and the rear of the property had been sold to someone who had built a Japanese style house on it. After the Japanese surrender, it was occupied by the American army and the Canadian missionaries hope to reclaim possession soon by proving ownership. With regard to the various properties in the Soviet zone of control, they report that most of it is in poor repair, much of

¹⁴ Letter from Rev. Chairin Moon to Dr. Armstrong, dated Oct. 1945 (United Church of Canada Archives, United Church of Canada Board of Overseas Missions Fonds, F502, series 6, Korea, 83.006C, 5-138.)

¹⁵ Letter from William Scott and E.J.O. Fraser to members of the Korea Mission, dated January 4, 1947. (United Church of Canada Archives, United Church of Canada Board of Overseas Missions Fonds, F502, series 6, Korea, 83.006C, 6-146.)

it was occupied forcefully, first by the Japanese and then by the Soviets, there has been a great deal of damage, including burning as the Japanese withdrew, and several of the schools and hospitals have had to cease operations.

In a further letter, dated the same day, Scott and Fraser outline preliminary plans about what might be possible if and when the missionaries are able to return to the former mission field in the north:

*It is, of course, still impossible for us to go to Hamkyung Provinces, or to North Kando, and consequently a proper survey of conditions there cannot be made. Indeed, it may be years before we get there, and it may be that we may get to some stations and not to others. In fact, conditions may be such that we may never be able to regain possession of all the property of the Mission in northeast Korea.*¹⁶

Reclaiming the Property

It is not clear when the document noted earlier that lists all the United Church properties owned in 1942 was produced, or by whom (appendix II: "Summary of Property in Korea - with values, The United Church of Canada, Korea Mission"). From the dating on the second page, it seems to have been produced in January of 1946, which would have been before Fraser returned to Korea, but after the United Church had received the letter from Rev. Moon. There is no explanation of its purpose given, but it seems to have been produced for the purpose of seeking reparations from the Japanese government, in an attempt to regain possession of property in both Korea and Manchuria, regardless of whether it had been sold to Japanese authorities (under duress) or merely occupied by them. It therefore provides what seems to have been a detailed list of all the property that The United Church of Canada owned in Korea at the point the missionaries departed in 1942, regardless of what might have happened to it in the meantime. This document is valuable in the present moment because it provides a detailed list of properties owned by The United Church of Canada at the point of departure, as well as archival evidence of the intention to reclaim it.

As it happens, the only property that The United Church of Canada was able to reclaim in the end was the property in Seoul. Scott reports that following the surrender of Japan in 1945 the missionary residence was occupied by the American military and then used by the military government to house Japanese technicians they had brought over from Japan to improve the telephone system in Seoul. The United Church was able to regain possession of it through legal process by September of 1947.¹⁷ As for the Japanese-style house that had been built behind the residence, Scott reports that the Woman's Missionary Society was able to buy it in 1949 at a cost of about \$3000 as a residence for women missionaries.

Part III: 1974 Actions by PROK and United Church of Canada

Following the Korean War, The United Church of Canada expanded its mission presence in

¹⁶ Letter from William Scott and E.J.O Fraser to United Church of Canada Mission regarding "Projects towards Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Urgent Needs for the Future of the Korea Mission," dated January 4, 1947 (United Church of Canada Archives, United Church of Canada Board of Overseas Missions Fonds, F502, series 6, Korea, 83.006C, 6-146.)

¹⁷ Scott, *Canadians in Korea*, 177-78.

the Republic of Korea, again acquiring a considerable number of properties as operations expanded. During the 1950's and 60's, while South Korea was recovering from the Korean War, there was some necessity for this, but as time went by, for various reasons the properties became a source of tension with the PROK. In March 1974, there was a consultation held in Seoul that involved representatives from both the PROK and The United Church of Canada.

The official statement on the consultation mentions a number of measures that were agreed upon at that time, including the cessation of the current policy of grants from the DWO to the recurring budget of the PROK, while also providing for the PROK to invite the participation of The United Church of Canada "in certain projects and programmes of a special nature which it will hope to undertake in the future."¹⁸ This essentially established the current arrangement between the United Church and the PROK. Furthermore, provision was also made for the transfer over to the PROK of several properties owned by the United Church.

Although the statement does not mention the handing over of all properties, the consultation seems to have set the groundwork for it. The consultation seems to have produced a positive shift in the relationship between the two churches. In the words of the statement:

*The discussions took place in an atmosphere of frankness and cordiality. We found such a consultation to be most meaningful and fruitful, as will be seen by the recommendations which follow as well as the agenda items that remain for future consideration. **We believe we have charted a new and significant course in our co-operative relationship in mission.***

Within the following few years, all remaining properties owned by The United Church of Canada were transferred over to the PROK (including the property in Seoul re-acquired by the United Church after the liberation from Japan).

As has so often been the case in the history of the United Church's mission engagement, it seems that partnership practice preceded partnership policy. It was only through engaging with partners that the United Church developed its understanding of the principles of mutual partnership. The 1974 agreement seems to have provided the blueprint for future decision-making, in Korea and elsewhere. [Viz. GCE decision in September 2020 to distribute all remaining United Church of Canada-related funds in Japan to partners in Japan.] This action, undertaken in conjunction with the PROK, is remembered as a watershed moment in the relationship between the two churches, providing the basis for mutual sharing in future relationships. It also provides a framework for a possible response to the present request.

Part IV: How the United Church might respond **Important Considerations**

The PROK Declaration of 2021 envisions that those individuals who owned property in the

¹⁸ See Appendix III, "Joint Statement of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the Division of World Outreach of The United Church in Canada" (United Church of Canada Archives, United Church of Canada Board of World Missions Fonds, F503, series 13, Korea, 83.011C 16-21)

North prior to the Korean War that they left behind when forced to flee, would formally give up claims to this property as a gesture towards reconciliation between North and South.

In considering how to respond to the invitation to renounce all claim to former property in what is now the DPRK, the United Church would need take into account the reality that Korea under Japanese rule in 1942 was a very different situation than the Korea immediately following the cessation of the Korean War in 1953. United Church missionaries did not suffer the trauma and violence, the pain and suffering of war as did Koreans forced to flee during the Korean War. As foreign nationals, they were not individuals that “left property behind,” they were prisoners of war who were returned home safely to Canada under a prisoner swap, with former United Church properties entrusted to the care of a custodian. The response of the United Church would need to recognize these differences.

Moreover, the response cannot be misconstrued as a legal action—in order to formally relinquish a claim to property, one has to produce legitimate claim. Rather, any response must be clear in its nature as a symbolic action, answering the call from partners to stand in solidarity with them, as the PROK seeks to shift the dominant narrative in Korean society, and within Korean churches, from one of hostility and conflict to peacemaking and reconciliation.

Recommended United Church of Canada Statement in Support of the PROK’s Declaration

A Declaration Regarding the Renunciation of Claims to Former United Church of Canada Mission Property in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea”

The United Church of Canada expresses its support for and solidarity with The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) in its peace-making efforts in Korea and joins in partnership with the PROK to urge “the people of South and North Korea to overcome the division of hatred and confrontation and move toward reconciliation and reunification.”

The United Church of Canada knows from its own commitment of working towards right relations with indigenous peoples in Canada that the work of reconciliation is not an easy or straightforward process. It requires patience, listening, and trust-building, and an acknowledgement of our own complicity in structures of oppression. As difficult as this work may be, it is the ministry to which God has called us as Christians. Paul reminds the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, just as God, through Christ, “was reconciling the world to Godself,” so too we, as Christ-followers, have been invited to participate in this “ministry of reconciliation” in our own time, joining with others in participating with God in mending and healing of creation.

Some 50 years ago, The United Church of Canada’s understanding of mutuality in mission led in South Korea to the handing over of all mission properties to the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. The United Church of Canada now formally renounces all intention of retaining claims of ownership of property in what is now North Korea and joins with partners in the ministry of reconciliation in Korea.

The United Church of Canada undertakes this action in the faith that this symbolic gesture

expresses solidarity with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and supports its efforts to shift the narrative in Korea from hostility and conflict to peacemaking and reconciliation. We unite with Korean partners and all who seek justice and peace in the Korean Peninsula:

*“in turning toward the path of reconciliation and cooperation,
so that Koreans of both South and North Korea
can rejoice and laugh together in new and creative ways.”*