SOUTH KOREA

The Republic of Korea is known for its proximity to China and North Korea, its evangelical church and its missionary-sending heart. The church needs firm grounding in the Bible amidst a materialistic culture.

Population
- Population: 48.5 million
- Density: 497 per sq km
South Korea is quite homogenous ethnically, but a growing percentage of the population is from foreign countries such as Indonesia, China, Cambodia, Vietnam and Mongolia. The capital, Seoul, is densely populated with more than 10 million people.

Religions
- Non-religious 30.98%
- Christian 30.95%
- Buddhist 23.7%
- Minority people religion 7.0%
- Eastern Religion 2.7%
- Muslim 0.29%
- Baha’i 0.08
There is complete religious freedom. Christianity is on the decline due to anti-Christian sentiment among many young people. Cults are also increasing, taking souls from the true church. Confucianism (more of a moral philosophy than a religion) and Shamanism have a powerful effect on the older generation’s life and religion, but young people tend to follow newer trends of religion and lifestyle.

Language
Korean, with some regional dialects. Korean is similar to Japanese in grammar and contains many borrowed Chinese words. Most educated Koreans can read English, which is taught in primary and secondary schools.

Geography
Korea is a mountainous peninsula jutting southeast from the border of Northeast China. It also borders the Sea of Japan (East Sea) and the Yellow Sea. Steep scrub-covered mountains and narrow terraced valleys dominate the scene throughout the peninsula. However, farmland stretches from the east-to-west in some parts as well.

Climate
South Korea has a temperate climate, with cold, dry winters and hot, rainy summers, although in recent years it seems to have had a more tropical climate, with short springs and autumns. In Seoul the average January temperature range is 23-28°F (-5 to -2.5°C) and the average July temperature range is 70-84°F (21-29°C). The wet season occurs in July. At other times there is moderate rainfall and generally long, clear sunny days in autumn and winter.

History
The Republic of Korea was founded on August 15, 1948 following the post-World War II partitioning of the peninsula between the occupying forces of the U.S. in the south and the USSR in the north. The main business of the new government was the suppression of leftist groups, which led to the North Koreans beginning the Korean War in 1950. North Korea was supported by the Chinese; South Korea by the U.S. and UN forces. An armistice was signed in 1953.

The country’s recovery from the war was slow, and the political scene chaotic. But from the mid-1960s came a change of economic fortunes as capital flowed in and the country flourished. South Korea is one of the “Four Dragons” of East Asia and it pushed its labor force to a work effort seldom matched elsewhere, even during wartime. However, with a much higher standard of living and an easing of authoritarian controls, the work pace softened and growth rates have slowed. Emerging from a previously authoritarian regime, democratic reforms from the late 1980s were not smooth. The political scene is dominated by the situation with Communist North Korea. Relationships began to improve in the mid-1980s, and the border was opened to allow family visits. In 1994 relationships were severely strained as North Korea began saber rattling about nuclear-weapons development. As part of the pact resolving this, North Korea agreed to resume high-level talks with South Korea.

In August 2000 the South and North Korean governments arranged a reunion of 100 elderly relatives from each side. Similar reunions have happened since. It is unclear what the recent ascension of new NK leader Kim Jong-Un will mean for the future of the peninsula.

South Korea has weathered economic and social issues in the past two decades while also increasing its presence on the world stage.

Christianity
South Korea is unique in East Asia in that it has a very strong church. Although the gospel only came to Korea in 1866 and the first Protestant church was planted in 1884, today there are perhaps as many as 50,000 Protestant churches (Operation World).

When OMF International workers first visited South Korea in the early 1950s, they felt that the strength of the existing missionary force was such that OMF International input was not needed. However, in 1966 OMF International was invited to send workers, and a small team of OMF International workers came to...
Korea to assist the church in youth ministry and publishing.

South Korea’s church has boasted many superlatives: the world’s largest congregations, the largest evangelistic events, the biggest theological seminaries. But in the 1990s church growth in South Korea reached a plateau and membership, particularly among young people, is now declining at up to five percent per year. Not surprisingly, young people’s commitment to mission is also declining. There is a great need for faithful Christians who can teach how to follow biblical principles and teachings.

South Korea is now the second largest missionary-sending country in the world and is blessed with impressive missionary training and sending structures. Koreans are strategically placed to reach the rest of Asia, and many have gone out with OMF International and other agencies.

Bible teaching and an emphasis on devotional life remain at the heart of OMF International’s ministries in South Korea. These have included student work, leadership and discipleship training and expository Bible teaching. OMF International workers work in partnership with local churches. Encouraging these churches to be mission-oriented and to train missionary candidates has always been a high priority. There are now openings for Christians to assist the church in teaching English to Koreans as a means of outreach.

### Strategic Priorities
- To glorify God by strengthening the movement for biblical reform and its expression in daily life
- Leadership training and missions mobilization in partnership with local churches.

### Opportunities
- English teaching.
- Lecturing and training posts in Bible and theological colleges, including training for missions.

Updated March 2013

**HOW TO PRAY**

- Pray that growing materialism would not dampen the spiritual energies of Christians.
- Many young people go on short-term missions trips. Pray that this would be a challenge to life-long commitment.
- Pray for the effective preparation of Korean missionary trainees, and for many more workers to help in training Korean missionaries.
- There are Korean Diaspora communities around the world. Most have churches and some are sending high numbers of missionaries.
- Social concern is growing in the evangelical churches. Pray for a thorough approach to ministry and evangelism among the marginalized.
- Pray for unity between the Christian denominations. There has been a history of divisions over doctrine and because of personality clashes among leaders.
- New Christians are often from Buddhist and Confucian backgrounds; pray for good teaching and helpful discipleship.
- Pray for biblical servant leadership to develop. Korea has a culture of authoritarian leadership, with pastors enjoying a high social status.
- It is widely believed that success and prosperity are indications of God’s blessing. Pride has been taken in statistical growth, impressive organization and buildings. Some leaders may be tempted to seek success more than lifting up the cross.
- As North Korea begins to open up, pray for wisdom for the South Korean church in outreach and support to escapees and Christians in the North.