



# MARYKNOLL OFFICE FOR GLOBAL CONCERNS

## *Peace, Social Justice and Integrity of Creation*

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### **Maryknoll Missioners celebrate the peaceful encounter and dialogue between the leaders of North and South Korea**

**WASHINGTON, DC** — Maryknoll Missioners celebrate with the Korean people the historic meeting of the leaders of North and South Korea on April 27. In a dialogue full of symbolic meaning to Koreans, President Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Chairman Kim Jong-un of North Korea pledged to work to remove all nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula and, within the year, pursue talks with the United States to declare an official end to the Korean War. It was the first time a North Korean leader had set foot in South Korea.

The dialogue took place at the Peace House, a conference building on the South Korean side of the uninhabited “truce village” of Panmunjom, where the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed 65 years ago, ending the Korean War without a peace treaty. Maryknoll Sister Dolores Geier commented from Seoul: “Like the rest of the world, we sat spellbound, watching on television the historic meeting of President Moon and Chairman Kim. The warmth and friendliness that they exhibited and the symbolic ceremonies fill us with hope.”

Sister Jean Maloney, a Maryknoll Sister who has lived in Korea for over 50 years, also described the meeting as an inspiring and hopeful experience. “To see the two leaders meet, embrace, and speak together in their own language, expresses that Koreans are one people, one country,” she said. “The soil placed on the pine tree planted by President Moon and Chairman Kim was a mixture from mountains in the far North and far South as was the water a mixture taken from rivers in the North and the South. Signing a peace treaty and working out a way to join together requires new structures, dialogue, trust and forgiveness. It is a new beginning. May it continue on and spread true peace and reconciliation across the Korean Peninsula and world.”

Maryknoll Father Gerald Hammond, who has lived and worked in South Korea since 1960 and received the Gaudium et Spes Award from the Knights of Columbus in 2017 for his ministry treating tuberculosis patients in neighboring North Korea, has felt the weight of the obstacles to reunification that have kept his dream of a unified and peaceful Korea from coming true for so many years. “Frankly speaking, I feel like I’m like Moses; [I thought] I’d never see the Promised Land,” Fr. Hammond said in an interview with Maryknoll magazine last year.

The roots of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Korean Mission began in 1923 in what is now North Korea. The Maryknoll Sisters began their missionary work in Pyongyang in 1932 and were instrumental in the start of the first Korean Sisters community, named the Sisters of Perpetual Help. Since the end of the Korean War, which killed more than 5 million soldiers and civilians, including Maryknoll Missioners, no other Maryknoll Missioner has lived or ministered in North Korea and communication with anyone associated with Maryknoll missions in North Korea has been lost. With the end of the Korean War, Maryknoll Missioners returned to the Korean Peninsula, establishing missions in South Korea that continue today.

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***Maryknoll Sisters • Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers • Maryknoll Lay Missioners***

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“We join with the people of Korea in prayer and in every effort to work for peace. Realizing that there is much that must be accomplished, we are grateful for the steps that have been taken,” said Father Raymond Finch, Superior General of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.

Sister Antoinette Gutzler, President of the Maryknoll Sisters, concurred: “Maryknoll Sisters celebrate this historic meeting of the leaders of North and South Korea and their pledge to seek a peace treaty and total denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. While many challenges remain to achieve these ambitious goals, we applaud their commitment to dialogue, which is the only way to peace. Having accompanied the Korean people in the South for over 60 years, the Maryknoll Sisters join in the hopes and prayers of the Korean people for a lasting peace that will bring together families divided by North and South.”

Recognizing the substantial challenges that remain to be confronted in the negotiations ahead, the Maryknoll Missioners encourage President Trump and his administration to seize the historic opportunity to achieve a peace enabled by this bold meeting of the two leaders of Korea. As Catholic missioners founded in the United States with over 60 years serving the Korean people both in the South and the North, we accompany families who have suffered separation from their loved ones since 1954, who yearn for a peace that will allow them to reunite their families. The Ministry of Unification in South Korea reported in January that out of the 131,447 individuals in South Korea who have registered with the Korean Red Cross since 1988 as having family in the North, more than 72,000 have died. Almost 12,000 of those alive are aged 90 and above. For them, time is running out. We also see the devastating long-term effects of a war that has yet to be officially ended - a nuclearized conflict that continues to exact a heavy price on the people of both Koreas.

While it remains to be seen whether North Korea will give up or even reduce its nuclear weapons – or if the United States will be willing to reduce its nuclearized military presence in South Korea -- as Pope Francis has insisted, dialogue is the only way to peace. Negotiations and a commitment to dialogue are preferable to the path to war on which we have been in recent months.

We recognize that many other questions need be addressed, such as grave human rights abuses in North Korea, verification and the role of China and the United States, but the Panmunjom Declaration is an historic opportunity for reunification and peace that should be applauded and seized by President Trump and his administration.

*The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missioners, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missioners serve.*

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