

Korean Missionary Activities and Performance

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Growth and Recent Slowdown of Korean Missions

Having experienced phenomenal growth from the 1970's until now, missionaries' growth has slowed. In the previous years, growth figures have indicated a visible decline in the number of ministers. Additionally, many missionaries who had left their homes for missionary work have started returning, contributing to the lower growth. Several analyses and studies have been presented that were committed to finding the reasons for the overall decline and studied the increasing globalization of the Korean proselytization programs and the evolving issues that need to be tackled for sustaining growth.

Sustainability and Missionary Statistics

Missionary activities in Korea are facing an issue of non-sustainability. Statistics show that until December 2015, the annual growth had slowed to 1.01% annually, which meant only an increase of 205 persons annually. The growth rate of specific denominational missionaries was even slower. The gradual annual decrease has been consistent since 2012. Up until 2006, the Korean missionary movement enjoyed a consistently high growth. Korean missionary agencies grew progressively from 21 to 74 from 1979 through 1990, then from 136 to 174 in 2000-2006. Surveys displayed a progression from 1645 to 8103 during 1990-2000, reaching as high as 14,905 in 2006, i.e., total missionaries. During the 27 years from 1979 to 2006, the growth rate was 160-fold. Annual growth remained close to 25 percent throughout the '90s and fell to 7.6 percent in the 2000s. In 2014, 304 Korean missionaries reverted home, ending their field ministry before the projected time. (Growth, 2008)

Global Distribution of Korean Missionaries

Internationally, the leading countries where Korean missionaries operate are China, Russia Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Japan, and India. The ministers in American, German, and Canadian missions generally occupy positions in campus ministries. Recently, many missionaries have been directed to oversee missions in Russia, India, Japan, and Thailand. The high growth rate of Korean ministers during the last thirty or forty years is a consequence of top globalization trends, both within Korea and outside. Globalization played a crucial role in expanding the missionary movement. The administration's policies that permitted unrestricted movement and travel allowed long-term

overseas residence, highly expediting the missionary movement's expansion. Since many young Korean Christians entered theology schools and seminaries to study, many of them committed themselves to leading missions and proselytizing efforts. Since there were not enough ministry positions for those graduates in Korea, they looked overseas for service, which explains the upsurge during those years. (Growth, 2008)

Causes of Declining Missionary Growth

The recent decline in growth can be attributed to some factors. A significant cause for such erosion is the general decline of churches in Korea, which signifies a fading support base. Another reason is the spontaneous withdrawal of preachers from the field, a matter of grave concern in missionary circles. Many had to leave because of forced deportation, reentry rejections, widespread diseases, visa restrictions social unrest, etc. The number of missionaries forced to leave is nearly the same as those who left voluntarily. But those who have been forced to withdraw usually set up or enter a ministry in a new country of service that they are assigned to. A survey was conducted to collect information about the problems and issues faced by evangelists and missionaries, or what their fears were, that led them to withdraw. A primary reason was trouble securing required visa extensions and the missionaries' nervousness about being exposed as evangelists who came for their mission. Sometimes, it was stressful due to being forced to leave their mission country on a short warning. Some reported being disappointed with constant rejection and not getting the expected spiritual results. Some required consolation for having entered a state with concealed motives. They stated the need for community care and healing. Readjusting to new roles after being designated to a new country or beginning a new lifestyle. Having identity issues as missionaries. Sometimes, family issues lead to problems as children of missionaries often feel displaced and homeless, for departing from their original country, leaving friends, neighbors, and the environment they were accustomed to (Steve Sang Cheol Moon, 2015).

Strategic Responses by Mission Leaders

Due to these factors contributing to negative growth, there is an increasing collective realization among mission directors and leaders to counter the problems that affect the sustainability of activities. A significant majority believe that a robust revitalization effort is needed to increase durability through critical approaches and studies. A sluggishness in overall church growth and the diminishing importance of missions were recognized as the main explanations for fading sustainability. Many identified those causes that affect the community internally rather than externally as the key factors needing readdressing. Handing over positions and responsibilities to local communities would help resolve many issues affecting growth. The participants of the survey consider opinions directly from the missionaries in the field to be more important in understanding the revitalization process, followed by executives. Relational training is more important than theoretical or procedural training for those in leadership positions. Personal steadiness and spiritual

maturity for executives are more important than knowledge, experience, or managerial capabilities. (Moon, 2016)

Conclusion on the Future of Korean Missions

In this phase of time, the Korean missionary campaigns are going through some unfamiliar problems that have caused them to lose momentum and created prospects for a bleak future. Most are well aware of the situation, however, hope for the future needs to be supplemented with realistic assessments. There is a requirement for introspection within, as agreed to by most survey respondents, and systematically addressing challenges to regain the previous growth rates.

References

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