

## New Life Baptist: A Global Reach

by M.I. Torres

While global perspectives may be taken for granted by some in a city as multi-cultural as Houston, such is not the case with one local congregation. New Life Baptist church is a multi-cultural, multilingual congregation in Southwest Houston, offering English, Spanish and Korean services. Not satisfied with simply a local multi-cultural expression, their pastor has led them to be involved for the past decade in planting churches in a country ruled and restricted by a Communist government.\*



It began in 1997, Senior Pastor Robert Park, visited the capital of this almost closed country as a tourist. Upon arrival, he stopped the first person he saw in his hotel and asked the man to show him to any church that was nearby. The man walked with the pastor for two miles, leading him to a Methodist church that was established 100 years before by American missionaries.

That evening he worshipped with the congregation. After the service, a few of the young members welcomed Park and spoke to him about the differences between legal and illegal churches. During the rest of his visit, a member took Park to home churches that met in secret in hundreds of different places in the capital. Members told Park that there were thousands of these churches forming all over the small nation.

The underground home church movement was unstoppable and Park was inspired. He returned to his congregation and shared his experience, telling them that they needed to get involved with what the Holy Spirit was doing in this nation and not pass up such an opportunity that amazed him with its driving force. Since this visit, Park has made over thirty trips to the nation.

In 2001, burdened by the lack of training available to the house church pastors, Park, with the assistance of some of the pastors in the area, started a bible college. As students graduate from the two year program, they are challenged to go into villages and towns that do not have churches of any kind and plant congregations. Since starting the bible college, 53 churches have been planted in the country. This year, after the March 28<sup>th</sup> graduation, 15 of 183 graduates have been commissioned to go into areas and plant 15 more churches.

When asked if these graduates are patriots or missionaries from other nations, Park responded, "All graduates are [patriots]. The true concept of missions is for the native people to do the work and foreigners to play the role of supporting from behind the scenes with providing, giving advice and teaching when necessary. But all the work and training needs to be done by [patriots]."

Planting churches within such restrictive government rules poses some unique obstacles, but Park works with the authorities to assure the safety and future of the leaders and congregations as much as possible.

In the nation, 20 different cities host the school program with over 600 students. The planted churches and their leaders are held accountable to Park and other pastors involved in the training as they help the leaders grow with their congregations.

As strong as the school and church planting have grown, Park acknowledges the difficulties and understands how careful everything must be handled. The school and churches deal with authorities who have shut down many churches. "Planting home churches is not really legal," explains Park, "but they've been letting it happen because it's so out of control and the nation cannot possibly shut them all down. But we are always running that risk."

Park and the New Life congregation, along with First Baptist Church, are also involved with a ministry to students in this foreign nation called Universidad Vida (Life University), or UniVida. Students meeting in small groups are heavily involved in discipleship training and experiences.

With all the projects and work going on abroad with the guidance of Park and New Life Church, many doors for those interested and inspired to help are also open. Park says, "There is great opportunity with low cost. The ministry is seeking supporters who will make a 3 year commitment of supporting churches with a monthly donation of \$50 for a single missionary, \$100 for a married missionary couple. Many missionaries and workers have been willing to sacrifice for the sake of spreading the Gospel in this Communist country, but they have no resources. Park says he is available to visit any church to present and explain, "what God is doing so they can all become partners, even just by understanding what's happening and by praying with us. I want to go to any church who will invite me."

*New Life Baptist Church hosts 4 Sunday morning services: English, 10am; Children's, 11:15am; Korean, 11:15am; Spanish, 12:45pm. For more information, call (281)575-1092 or visit [www.newlifehouston.org](http://www.newlifehouston.org)*

*\*The country is intentionally unnamed in this story to reduce the risk of any repercussions for the ministry of New Life and the churches in the focus country.*