

Woman-to-Woman Worldwide Service Project

For 2007-2008

My Sister's Place (Durebang) Uijeongbu City, Korea

By Jane Sullivan-Davis

My Sister's Place (Durebang), located in Uijeongbu City, Korea, (outside Seoul) is a mission program of the National Church Women's Association of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and is supported in part by grants from Global Ministries. Since My Sister's Place opened its doors in 1986, it has been a place of compassion and support for all women, especially current and former prostitutes, who have been living a life of alienation and oppression, and who are in need of friendship and hope. Through the development of mutual relationships based on love and trust that My Sister's Place offers, prostitutes in Uijeongbu City are able to recover their self-confidence and self-worth.



In the red-light districts adjacent to the U.S. military bases in Uijeongbu, many women work as prostitutes in clubs, massage parlors, and hostess bars. Roughly 80 percent of these women abuse drugs and alcohol. An even larger number of women over the age of forty are retired prostitutes, many of whom are in poor health, and who have no other work skills or family support. The average age of area prostitutes is getting steadily younger, as more and more women must turn to prostitution in order to make a living. Along with the violence and exploitation that often accompany the prostitutes' work, these women have also faced judgment, separation, and prejudice from the rest of society. The opening of My Sister's Place in 1986 represented the first step toward a more critical, public discussion about the issues of prostitution, and the specific situation of Korean women involved with U.S. soldiers.

Besides offering individual counseling geared to helping the women achieve self-confidence and hope, the center also provides educational programs and projects. A bakery program was developed in 1989, designed as alternative employment for older women who may have never had any job aside from prostitution and who can no longer support themselves. Through the program, it becomes possible to have more regular, long-term meetings with the participants, enabling the women

themselves to suggest further directions for the program, and taking part in creating a community to meet their needs.

Art and craft therapy allow the women to creatively express and explore memories and psychological conflict. The creation of small items such as Christmas decorations or patchwork becomes a visible fruit of the women's work, and is an important step in improving feelings of desolation, apathy, and isolation. English language and computer classes also are offered as ways to enable women to find alternative employment in Korea's technological society. A community library has been developed for the women and other village residents, and free lunches are provided for prostitutes and former prostitutes who have no money for regular meals. These meal-times have become a good opportunity for community building, and increasing trust and knowledge between the women and the staff. Interestingly, the women often speak more personally and freely in this informal setting than they do in a formal counseling session.

Recently, My Sister's Place published a book from the collected real-life experiences of the women. Through the sharing of these accounts, other organizations, as well as the general public, have become more aware of the problems facing prostitutes in

Korea. A fieldwork program for female college students was also established as an opportunity for students majoring in politics or social education to gain experience by working at the center during school breaks. Strong friendships between students and prostitutes have been formed in this way, and many of the student participants have been inspired by their experiences at the center and have become important leaders in women's movements at their schools.

In 1993, a prostitute named Yoon Kum-Yi was brutally murdered by an American soldier in Uijeongbu City. Immediately, My Sister's Place organized a large demonstration, uniting 3000 people for a rally, including many members of other women's and religious organizations. The movement denouncing the murder of Yoon Yum-Ki rapidly spread throughout the entirety of Korea, opening many people's eyes to the seriousness of the crimes and injustices prostitutes suffered at the hands of American soldiers, and the unfair agreement between Korea and the United States about how to handle such problems. In response to the public's concern for the lives of Korea's prostitutes, the National Campaign for the Eradication of Crime by U.S. Troops in Korea was formed. The director of My Sister's Place is on the board of the National Campaign, and the center continues to

play a very active role in this organization, designed to protect Korean Women from sexual abuse and violence.

The staff of My Sister's Place is convinced of the necessity of developing solidarity and sisterhood with people who are aware of the problem of prostitution in Korean society, and they encourage the public to break free of prejudices about prostitutes. Although My Sister's Place acknowledges that the issue of prostitution is an inevitable problem in society, they encourage everyone to find creative ways with which to approach this problem.

As a non-profit organization, My Sister's Place continually faces financial difficulties, and is in continual need of funds to support its flourishing programs. Donations are needed to assist My Sister's Place in campaigning for social policy change, and to support the various activities and programs provided for the women.

Gifts for this purpose may be made by check payable to Global Ministries, with the project listed on the memo line, and directed to:

Global Ministries
Office for Resource Development
PO Box 1986
Indianapolis IN 46206

Gifts may also be made on-line by visiting: www.globalministries.org and following the donations link. Please

note the project name, My Sister's Place.

Questions?
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