

FIRST STEPS

news

Spring 2018

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.

Matthew 13: 31-32 (NLV)

A First Steps team of three visited North Korea for a week in March. Working closely with local Ministry of Public Health officials and other partners, we visited daycares, kindergartens, orphanages, soymilk production centres and primary care clinics in Hyongjesan, Nampo, Wonsan, Munchon and Tongchon. During the visit we confirmed the arrival and partial distribution of 7.1 million sachets of micronutrient Sprinkles. A highlight of the trip was visiting two new beneficiary clinics.

At Shinmi Clinic in Hyongjesan, the sunlight reflected off the snow on the hill, making the surrounding fields as radiant as the gazes of all those gathered. Director Kim Sun-Man could scarcely contain his excitement as he welcomed us.

"I just don't know how to thank you enough for coming! Welcome to Shinmi," he said. "We've heard about [First Steps] for a long time and wondered when you'd come. We are a small community of mostly farmers, along with some teachers and doctors."

As I began to share about Sprinkles the health official accompanying us beamed. Later, she told everyone how she herself had benefitted from Sprinkles during her pregnancy with

her daughter, now a healthy 7 year old.

We didn't have time to stay for lunch, so the doctors pressed hot, roasted sweet potatoes into our hands as we left. Although meeting for the first time, we left the clinic feeling like old friends.

It is a blessing the first shipment of the year arrived as planned because ongoing sanctions are complicating and delaying shipments. Sanctions are causing the price of oil, gas, electricity and equipment to rise, resulting in further challenges for our North Korean partners. For example, in Wonsan we learned that in an effort to reduce shipping costs, boxes of Sprinkles had been placed in the empty spaces of Ministry of Public Health trucks already going that way. In Hyongjesan, a lack of electricity had forced the soymilk supply centre to deliver soybeans to the daycares to process on their own. The daycares turn the soybeans into soymilk using a traditional grindstone, a painstaking task.

During our visit, we received many sincere expressions of thanks for "help in the midst of hardship." I pass those thanks on to you: Thank you for sharing the love of Jesus to people in their time of need.

I would have loved to share all these stories with my late husband, Bob Ross, who passed into the arms of Jesus on December 25, 2017. Without his unfailing support, First Steps

would not exist. He was First Steps' beloved advisor, friend, prayer-companion, editor, writer and much more. Though his name did not once appear in print, his faithfulness, hidden service, and devotion to prayer is what, together with your prayers and mine, was a

vessel through which the unseen movements of Christ, "the smallest of all seeds," grew and will continue to grow.

Susan Ritchie
Executive Director



Bob and Susan on Mt. Paektu.

Sips, Slurps and Gulps of Satisfaction



A polite morning greeting.

It was a cold, snowy morning when the First Steps team arrived at the Wonsan Yangji Daycare. The children arrived one by one, some on their mothers' backs, others walking beside their grandmothers and some proudly marching on their own.

At the front door of the daycare, the children stopped to bow to the director



Loving hands serve up soymilk.

who greeted each child by name. After taking off their boots, they were met by Mrs. Ro Jong-Shim, a health worker, who squirted a shot of saline-garlic solution into their mouths. None of the children balked, they swallowed it and headed to class. The director explained that the children have received this simple remedy for years, to boost their immunity. "We haven't had any cases of influenza or pneumonia this year," she said proudly.

The children received their morning serving of soymilk in their classrooms. When the soymilk can was brought into the room, they settled down, sitting expectantly. As they drank their soymilk, all we could hear were sips, gulps and slurps of satisfaction. The director told us that they check the height and weight of each child on the 25th of every month. "None of them are underweight," she said.

"Please continue to support the children."

There are so many loving hands involved in the provision of soymilk, from the teachers and health workers who are with the children every day, to workers who prepare and deliver the soymilk, to supporters in Canada and around the world who give and pray. Thank you for your part in providing nourishment to these children!



A mother carries her son to daycare.



Every child at the Yangji Daycare receives a morning shot of garlic.



Careful sips of warm nutritious soymilk.



Pedal Power in Hanggu



Mr. Yon with his soymilk delivery bike.

Every Monday through Saturday at 8 a.m., Mr. Yon Jong-Sam hops on his bicycle to deliver soymilk produced at the Hanggu Daycare and Kindergarten Supply Centre in Nampo to nearby daycares and kindergartens. It takes him 30 minutes one way to deliver soymilk to Munhae, the furthest beneficiary location.

Mr. Yon showed us how he sets the milk can onto a metal rack on the back of his bike and uses a rubber cord to tie it down. He also has a special attachment for carrying two milk cans.

Although the day we visited Hanggu was chilly, around 5°C, Mr. Yon was wearing only a light sweater with his uniform.

We asked if this is how he usually dresses when delivering the soymilk on cold days. He replied, “it’s not that cold right now.”

The bitter winter cold is a fact of life in North Korea. Most of the locations we visit—daycares, kindergartens, orphanages, clinics, factories—are not heated or have only a few rooms with heated *ondol* floors.



Cleaning up after finishing the day's soymilk production.

Challenges in Hyongjesan

The Sopo #1 Kindergarten in Hyongjesan had been receiving soymilk made from First Steps soybeans delivered last summer. However, since December, due to a shortage of soybeans and electricity, not all kindergartens have been receiving soymilk.

Director Kim Wol-Son told us, “I’d like to thank you very much for your support last year. The children clap their hands when they get soymilk. They like it better than juice. They can get juice at home but only at school can they get soymilk. Unlike juice, when the children have soymilk, it keeps them full until they go home. Now they ask us why they aren’t given soymilk. It is unfortunate that we

cannot provide it.”

We asked if the lack of soymilk was affecting the children and she replied, “Yes, the children’s colour is better when they receive it. Those who are weaker to begin with are affected when there is no soymilk. The biggest difference is the children are hungry when they don’t receive soymilk.”

Director Kim expressed her gratitude for the beans sent last year. “Thank you for helping us.”

First Steps ships soybeans to North Korea once or twice a year to supplement the local supply. A shipment of soybeans is currently underway.



Whispers and giggles at the Sopo #1 Kindergarten.



Gifts of Kindness



Soybeans are shipped from Canada to North Korea to make soymilk. One cup of soymilk costs just 3 cents, including shipping.

Donate \$ _____ towards soybeans.



Micronutrient Sprinkles are sachets containing a blend of vitamins and minerals that are added to food. Sprinkles prevent anemia and rickets and lower the rates of diarrhea and pneumonia, the leading causes of death in children under two years of age. A \$50 donation to the Sprinkles program provides nine months of sachets for a pregnant and nursing mother and 18 months of sachets for a baby (6 to 24 months).

Donate \$ _____ towards micronutrient Sprinkles.



20-litre **stainless-steel milk cans** are vital for storing and transporting soymilk from production centres to the children we serve. They cost \$100 each.

Donate \$ _____ towards milk cans.



The **VitaGoat** is powered by combustible fuel (wood, coal, etc.). It processes soybeans directly into nutrient-rich soymilk and provides about 1,500 cups of soymilk per day to hungry children. The main difference from the VitaCow is that the VitaGoat runs without electricity. The cost of a VitaGoat is \$5500.

Donate \$ _____ towards a VitaGoat.



VitaCows process soybeans directly into soymilk providing children with a warm and protein-rich drink. The VitaCow is powered by electricity and can produce 2000 cups of soymilk per day to feed hungry children. The cost of the VitaCow is \$7000.

Donate \$ _____ towards a VitaCow.



name _____
address _____
city _____ prov. _____ postal code _____
phone _____ email _____

Please make cheques payable to First Steps Health Society and forward to: 3260 West 5th Ave. Vancouver, B.C. V6K 1V4 Canada
BIN: 821724036 RR0001. Gifts are acknowledged with an official receipt for income tax purposes.

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