

# HEAVEN-MOUNTAIN VILLAGE

## THE WORK OF GOD’S HANDS AND “PAYING IT FORWARD”: ONE MEMBER’S EXPERIENCE

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Imagine riding on the back of a roofless truck for two hours on a bumpy dusty road after spending 10 straight hours on a bus from Mexico City? That is the only way to get to the tiny village of Potoichan. This small town is stowed away in a deep mountainous area and offers very little to people in the way of agriculture, making it impossible to cultivate anything but corn. The sisters of Potoichan call this deserted land the Heaven-Mountain Village.

There is such a dearth of water supply in the village that doing laundry or taking a shower is considered a luxury to the inhabitants. The sisters traded in their habits for T-shirts and jeans to relate better to the children of Heaven-Mountain Village better. From dusk to dawn, there is not a minute that the sisters sit still.

In total, 15 villages are scattered across this unforgiving mountain. The locals only know one way to sustain themselves on this harsh land; they live off of tortillas made from corn that is harvested from the gravel-ridden fields. With households supporting roughly eight to nine children each, families marry off their children at about the age of 12. Until they are married, there is minimal care given to raising the children. There are countless women and children who do not have the two dollars needed for transportation. The area is lawless; shootings occur every week for absurd reasons. Nevertheless, villagers have the benevolence to bring wild flowers to church, and the sisters truly hold them dear to their hearts.

Once, a girl came running to the sisters at dawn, soaked from the rain, to ask for a piece of cloth to cover her recently deceased mother. The sisters of the Heaven-Mountain Village take on multiple roles as mothers, doctors, nurses, counsellors, nannies, and life advisors whenever they are needed. They say that being with the villagers is a true blessing for them, and they are grateful for every minute that they are able to spend there. They tell of sleepless nights struggling with fleas and facing poisonous scorpions, a price they can accept in order to see the changes that they bring to the village. The sisters’ diligence and love bring changes

to villagers’ daily lives and, since their arrival, the number of shooting incidents has dropped significantly.

The first task that the sisters set up for the village is the building of a bread factory. By selling hand-woven dish cloths and rosaries, the sisters are earning the money to fulfill this goal, one brick at a time. Like the blue-eyed missionaries who once brought desperately needed supplies to Korea long ago, these sisters, with help from their Korean homeland, are finding it in their hearts to reach out and help others who are in need. The bread factory, which sprouted from a simple thought and some willing hearts, is scheduled to be completed this year.

The sisters in Heaven-Mountain Village are now in their sixties. When I look at the sisters, who chose such challenging lives as missionaries, it reminds me of my childhood, and the German priest who devoted his life to build a church in my poor and uneducated hometown in Korea. He, whom I can only describe as a gracious being, had constantly reminded villagers to never thank him, but to pay it forward in generosity to others. More than 50 years have passed since I was told this, and after two special visits to Heaven-Mountain Village, I can finally

understand what he meant by his words.

The children of the village may seem helpless now, but they will certainly remember the love and help that was given to them from the *corea madre*, and will someday reciprocate that care by aiding others who are in need. As the Lord says, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap...” (Luke 6:38).

Just as it was for the priests before them who gave up the luxuries in life to station themselves in foreign lands, the sisters will remain in the hearts of those they have touched. I long for the day I am summoned back to the village to meet them again. †



Stone metate for grinding corn by hand.



*For God and Canada*