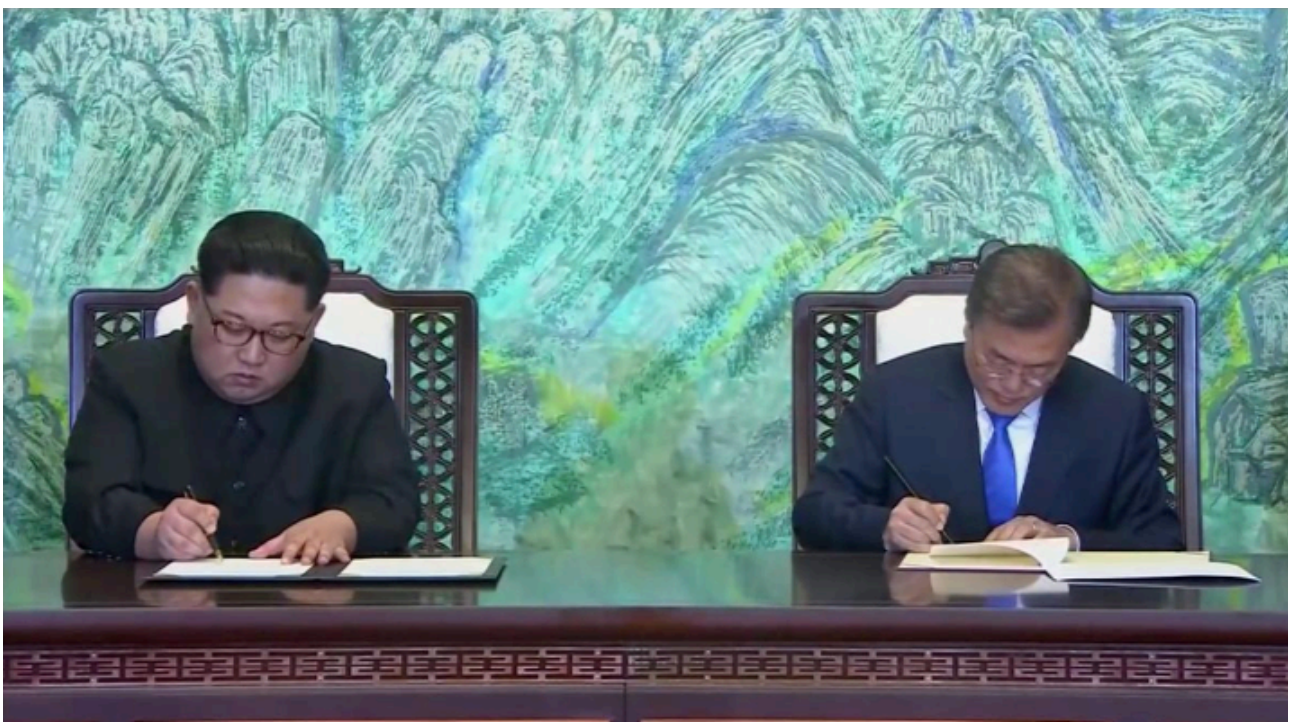




## **FAITH PERSPECTIVE - The Korean summit: Not just diplomacy, an answer to prayer**



The meeting between North Korea's Kim Jong Un and South Korea's Moon Jae In today is already being hailed as historic, with the two leaders pledging to work towards declaring an official end to the 1950s Korean War and committing to seek an agreement to establish 'permanent' and 'solid' peace.

April 30 2018

Their declaration included promises to pursue phased arms reduction, cease hostile acts, transform their fortified border into a peace zone and seek multilateral talks with other countries including the United States. 'The two leaders declare before our people of 80 million and the entire world there will be no more war on the Korean peninsula and a new age of peace has begun,' they said.

While the meeting is acknowledged to be only a first step on a long road after years of increasing tension brought to a head by North Korea's successful acquisition of long-range nuclear weapons capability, it is result not just of diplomacy but of prayer, Christians believe. Korean Christians have prayed for the unity of the divided peninsula for decades. The Korean Conference on Religion for Peace issued a statement beforehand saying: 'Since the 2018 Winter Olympics, we have witnessed positive signs of peace in the region, which we hope will blossom like flowers do in the spring.'



It said: 'We call on our government to fully carry out its obligations, not only as a mediator but also as a state directly involved in the matter. 'We call on the North Korean government to use this perfect opportunity to put an end to division and break the fetters that have limited and restrained this land for over 70 years. We sincerely hope North Korea will pave the way for the Korean people to live together.'

April 30 2018

Last night at a church in Paju, just south of the border, 30 Presbyterian ministers held an all-night vigil of prayer for the success of the summit meeting.

The National Council of Churches in Korea has been holding special prayer meetings for peace on the peninsula every day for the last week, while a group of Christian politicians held a morning of prayer and fasting for reunification at the National Assembly buildings, according to [Yonhap News](#).

Catholic bishops in the South issued a call to pray for the meetings earlier this month. Bishop Peter Lee Ki-heon, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea Committee for the Reconciliation of the Korean People, wrote that it had been a 'tumultuous time'. However, he said: 'There is a growing expectation that a new era of peace on this land will come after the long confrontation and conflict of 65 years.'

He said the Winter Olympics had sparked a dialogue that was 'a miracle that could be unimaginable even six months ago'. 'There is a lot of reasons why this dramatic change happened, but I think that the first and foremost reason is desperate prayers of the faithful. God answered our prayers with this valuable opportunity,' he wrote.

He said of the summit conference: 'This is a precious opportunity that God gives us, Korean people. We need to fervently keep praying for a everlasting peace on this Korean Peninsula.'

In Seoul, Cardinal Andrea Yeom, who serves as the 'apostolic administrator' of the Northern capital Pyongyang, where religion is severely restricted, stressed the tenacity of Christians in the face of discouragement. A special mass of reconciliation has been celebrated every Tuesday for 23 years. This week the cardinal spoke of a 'wind of peace' blowing upon the peninsula and said the summit was 'a very precious opportunity of grace which God provides our people who are yearning so deeply for the true peace'. However, he warned: 'peace in the Korean Peninsula cannot be maintained by the nuclear armament at all. It can only be realized by assuring that all people live a life truly worthy of a human being, trusting one another, on the basis of love and justice.'

Pope Francis added his prayers to those of Koreans, saying on Wednesday that the meeting was an opportunity for 'transparent dialogue and a concrete path to reconciliation' in order to guarantee peace on the peninsula and throughout the world.



On April 19, the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) held an ecumenical worship for peace on the Korean Peninsula at Yeondong Presbyterian Church in Seoul attended by around 400 people.

On Sunday April 29 the NCCCK is asking its member churches to hold a special offering for peace and inter-Korean exchange projects. While there are warm words between the two leaders of the North and South and signs of genuine progress, all those involved are aware that there are significant hurdles ahead, not least the involvement of the unpredictable US president Donald Trump, who is expected to meet Kim Jong Un in late May or June. And while Kim has pledged to stop nuclear tests, he could extract a heavy price for complete de-nuclearisation of the peninsula, which Western and regional powers may not be willing to pay.

In the meantime, Christians have welcomed the results of the summit. The NCCCK said: 'Having recognised the absurdity and pain brought forth by separation, for more than 50 years the NCCCK has worked for the reconciliation and peace of Korea while praying without ceasing. 'We strongly support the agreement to replace the armistice treaty with a peace treaty by the end of this year, and to build a long-lasting and stable peace in the peninsula through complete denuclearisation.'

April 30 2018

The NCCK also supports the agreement to transform the demilitarization zone into a 'peace zone' and to establish a peace zone in the West Sea. 'We also support the commitment to cease all hostile military acts,' the statement continues. 'We strongly support the agreement to ensure the participation of civilians in the reunification process as seen in the decision to establish a joint liaison office and to resume the reunion events of the separated families.'

World Council of Churches general secretary Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit said: 'The reported commitment by both leaders to actively pursue the replacement of the Armistice Agreement with a Peace Treaty this year – thereby formally ending the Korean War – would, if achieved, be the realisation of a call promoted by the National Council of Churches in South Korea, the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea, and the World Council of Churches for many years, but long dismissed as impossible by political "realists". But peace is possible.'

Tveit stressed that the signing of a such a peace treaty 'will be the start, not yet the end, of the work for a sustainable and secure peace for current and future generations of people in the region'.

