

News and Current Events :: Having Bible Still a Danger in N. Korea

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SEOUL, South Korea -- A few years ago, an astonishing rumor spread among the teenagers of Musan, a sad, hungry mining town hugging the North Korean side of the border with China.

If you slipped over and looked for a house with a cross, the people inside would give you a lecture on Christianity and a bowl of rice.

Choi Hwa knew this was dangerous stuff. Back when she was an impressionable 12-year-old, she and her classmates had been called out to watch the execution of a young woman and her father who were caught with a Bible. But Choi knew as well that the pangs in her stomach meant she might soon succumb to the starvation that had killed dozens of neighbors.

The then-teenager followed her stomach. Through it, she found her way to faith.

"Once you read the Bible, you stop believing in Kim Il Sung," said Choi, who is now 19 and living in Seoul, the South Korean capital. (Like many defectors, she is living under an assumed name to protect relatives in North Korea.) Choi recalled the daily recitations of "Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung" required of children. But after studying with missionaries, she realized the extent to which "Kim Il Sung just replaced God's name with his own," she said.