

Presbyterian pastor detained by North Korea returns to Canada

The pastor had taken dozens of mission trips to the nation since 1997—until he was accused of undermining the government.

by [Lauren Markoe](#) in the [September 13, 2017](#) issue

Hyeon Soo Lim, a Canadian pastor imprisoned for more than two years in North Korea before being released last week, is now home and speaking about his ordeal.

“It’s a miracle for me to be here today,” he told congregants August 13 at Light Korean Presbyterian Church in the Toronto area, according to news reports.

The pastor, also known as Rim Hyon Su, had been accused of using religion as a ruse to overthrow the government. He was convicted of attempting to undermine the regime of Kim Jong-un; he was sentenced to life imprisonment in December 2015 and forced to engage in hard labor.

Lim, 62, was freed on humanitarian grounds, state media reported August 9. He had written to his family members about stomach pains and high blood pressure, according to CNN.

“From the first day of my detainment until the day I was released, I ate 2,757 meals in isolation,” he said in a statement released by the church. “But this isolation also gave me the opportunity to spend an extended time of solitude with God.”

The South Korean-born pastor had pleaded guilty to trying to undermine the worship of Kim Jong-un, which is required of all North Koreans. The state is officially atheist, with a constitution that guarantees freedom of religious belief. In practice, it has one of the bleakest human rights records in the world and harshly persecutes the religious, according to Human Rights Watch.

Lim’s family said he had traveled to North Korea more than 100 times since 1997, where his church ran missions to support an orphanage and to distribute food.

Concern over his fate increased after North Korea released an American student in a coma in June. Otto Warmbier, 22, who had suffered brain damage, died six days later. In response, the U.S. State Department announced a ban on Americans' travel to North Korea. That ban allows those who want to participate in humanitarian missions to North Korea to apply for a special passport to do so.

The American nonprofit Open Doors, which advocates for persecuted Christians worldwide, lists North Korea as the most oppressive nation for Christians in the world. It estimates that there are 300,000 Christians in the nation of 25 million.
—Religion News Service; other news reports

A version of this article, which was edited on August 25, appears in the September 13 print edition under the title "People: Hyeon Soo Lim."