

FFWPU USA: We celebrate the Korean holiday of Chuseok

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Photo courtesy of Michelin Guide

Chuseok, known as Korean Thanksgiving, is considered the biggest and most meaningful holiday among Koreans. It's celebrated by some 30 million people, including many Unificationists. Notably during this time, the year's harvest of crops and fruits are offered to ancestors - also a common practice of honor in the Unification faith.

This year, Chuseok goes from Sept. 28 through 30, following the lunar calendar. Family members from near and far come together to share food and stories and give thanks to their loved ones.

Below are three interesting facts about Chuseok and how to celebrate:

Charye

Charye is an ancestor memorial ritual that has been carried out for thousands of years in Korea. On the morning of Chuseok, family members gather in their homes to hold a memorial service for their ancestors, usually up to about four preceding generations. During the ceremony, various foods, fruits, and beverages are offered to the ancestors. Each dish has a designated spot on the table and there are set processes, such as lighting candles. After the ceremony, everyone sits together to enjoy the food as they reunite and bond with their family members.

Songpyeon

Songpyeon is a Chuseok specialty dish. This crescent moon-shaped rice cake is made with rice from the first harvest of the year, filled with ingredients such as powdered sesame, red beans, brown sugar, and chestnuts. The finishing touch is a fragrant pine scent, achieved by layering the cake with pine needles. There is also an associated belief that the person who makes Songpyeon into the nicest shape will meet a great spouse and have a beautiful baby.

Ganggangsullae

An ancient dance traditionally performed by women to bring about a bountiful harvest, Ganggangsullae has developed into a cultural symbol for Korea. It incorporates singing and dancing, and is mostly performed in the southwestern coastal province of Jeollanam-do.

The dance reportedly dates back to the 16th Century when the Japanese attacked Korea. A Korean naval commander ordered women to circle the mountains in military uniform to intimidate Japanese troops and make them think the Korean military was greater in number than it actually was.