

My Mission to Yemen begins - 1975

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Fritz Piepenburg in the old city of Sana'a

Before I left I could not find much information about Yemen. In a small booklet, I found some printed black and white photos of Sana'a, the capital. I did not have a very good or hopeful first impression from what I saw. Simple stone and mud houses dotted simple dirt roads. I felt I wanted to live in one of these houses and make it a center, for surely from it we would reach the hearts of many Yemeni. But it was hard to conceive of a Unification Church center in such a house, even in my imagination.

When my plane made a stopover in the city of Taiz and I stepped on Yemen's ground for the first time, I determined to start with the right attitude of heart from the beginning. I thanked God for the country that He had given me as I surveyed the mountains on the horizon, scattered bushes, shrubs, and above all, the multitude of stones. With a joyful heart I went to the edge of the tarmac and took a stone. It was warm from the sun; the warmth poured through my hand up into my arm. I felt as happy as a shipwrecked mariner who had finally come upon dry land after drifting on the ocean for days. Again and again I thought: "This is my country; Heavenly Father gave it to

me. This is my new homeland." I tossed some stones into the field; I heard their echoes as they flew through the desert air. I repeated this several times. As I walked on I suddenly felt a big thorn bore its way through my trousers and cut into my thigh. For a moment I was startled. I slowly pulled the thorn out of my flesh, but this could do nothing to mar my good mood. This was the first test the country gave me. "How much do you really love me?" was its question. And during these past years my country has asked it of me repeatedly!

Towards evening of my first day in Yemen, I wandered out to the streets and a completely new world opened in front of my disbelieving eyes. The brown mud and stone houses looked as if they had no roofs. The people who passed by seemed very wild-looking to me. They wore turbans, and around their hips had hung big crooked daggers which gave a militant impression. Women were dressed all in black and wordlessly flitted through the streets.

I dared to make my way deeper into the city. Barefoot children wearing skirts and little caps roamed through the lanes; the intense aroma of baked bread permeated the air. The sun could not be seen anymore. The clouds had faded into numerous hues of red. Never before had I experienced a sunset of such intensity. And then the whole city was instantly plunged into a symphony; from over forty minarets

throughout Sana'a, muezzins summoned the people to prayer. The people hastened to the mosque and soon the melodious recitation of the Koran could be heard from the loudspeaker.

Some people ignored me, others stared so ardently that I could feel their eyes on the back of my head. I had the distinct feeling they were asking, "Who are you? You are not one of us. You are completely different. Why did you come?"



With a close contact at the house they have built

The weekend trips we missionaries took together were most enjoyable. There was so much beauty to discover. Even though the landscape superficially seems bleak and grey, in reality it hides innumerable fascinations. When you walk in the treeless, stone-littered mountains, you get the feeling of eternity and power. Sometimes you meet a sheep or a flock of goats herded by a small shepherd boy. It is almost a miracle that the animals find enough in this scanty landscape to stay alive, much less grow. We saw flat fields high above the desert, waiting for rain. A farmer with two oxen and a wooden plow drew his lonely circles within the confines of his land. The farming is still so simple, it is unbelievable. Again and again we came upon colored stones that glittered like glass beads.

There is very little vegetation: you learn to enjoy every small flower, every herb; they are each precious. You learn the value of water. Wells, dug by hand, from which clear water can be pumped, are treasured. This means salvation for the dry soil. When the dry soil crumbles under the soles of your shoes, you can feel how old the country is. Abraham, or maybe Moses, could have walked here. And now as I walk this land, I wish to do so with acceptance, with love.

Fritz Piepenburg stayed in Yemen for 21 years, assimilating both the language and culture. Fritz ascended to the spirit world in October 2015.

In April 1992, the Grand Mufti of Yemen attended the Interfaith Blessing Ceremony, which True Parents officiated at the Olympic Stadium in Seoul.