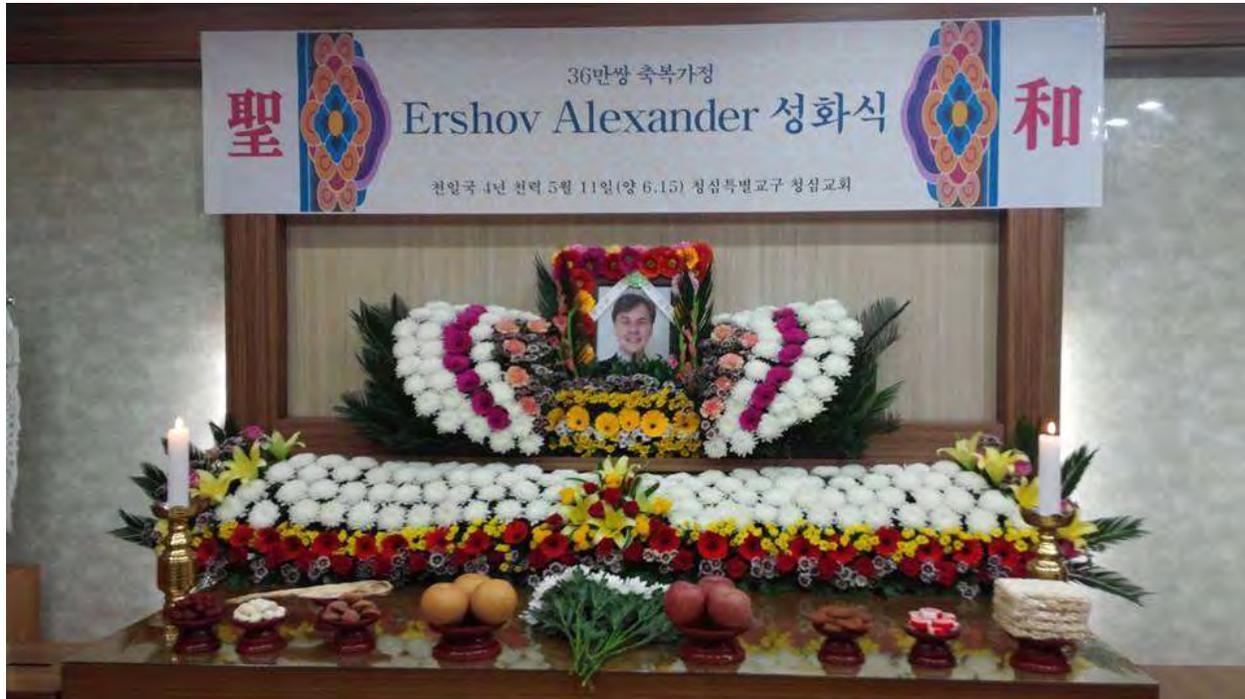


## Report on the Seonghwa Ceremony of Alexander Ershov

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June 15, 2016



It was a blessing and privilege to be present at the Seonghwa ceremony of Alexander Ershov, on June 15, a grey Wednesday morning somewhere in the Korean countryside. The room where the altar was set up in his honor was very small and there was only space for about 30 or 40 people to sit on the floor inside; an overflow crowd of at least that same number had to stand outside.

We sang several Korean Holy Songs and members offered flowers and sticks of incense on the altar. Dr. Joon Ho Seuk was among the attendees and he gave a beautiful talk about True Parents' providence in the former Soviet-Union in the 1990s – a “report” really, the way Father used to like them. This may have been a surprise to people used to conventional eulogies, where the speaker simply focuses on the person who has passed on. Of course, Dr. Seuk recognized Sasha's sincere efforts in mastering the Korean language while he was a university student in Moscow and his many valuable contributions when we were struggling to get our feet on the ground in the former communist empire. But he spoke powerfully of the value of Sasha's life in a much larger context. He helped us understand, not in a strained manner but in a very natural way, that Sasha's life had not just been his own, but was part of a much larger purpose of national and global recreation, as envisioned by God.

All of this was of course spoken in Korean, and although my Korean skills are still not perfect, I received the impact of the words beyond their literal, verbal meaning. I am not sure if this was just my own experience, or that of others as well, but I felt the whole room fill up with the spirit and heart of God. I was overcome by a profound, an overwhelming sense of gratitude to and love for God, and water began pouring not only from my eyes but nose as well. In this state, it is hard to tell the difference between sadness and joy because everything merges into one. This may sound irreverent to those who have never experienced this themselves, but Sasha's death did not seem to matter anymore at that moment: God's presence and love blurred the boundary line between life and death.

Rev. Dong Woo Kim, senior pastor of the Chung Pyung Cheongshim church, gave the Seonghwa sermon. His message, like Dr. Seuk's, was powerfully positive. He spoke of "three great blessings," not the ones that we read about in the Principle of Creation, but the blessing of life we receive at birth, the blessing of love between man and woman we receive when we get married, and the blessing of freedom and eternal life we receive at our so-called "death." These three events are cause for celebration, and Rev. Kim celebrated Sasha's entrance into the next world sincerely and eloquently, but also unapologetically with joy, a lightness of spirit and laughter.



I shed more tears of gratitude and, looking at my two older brothers, again understood in my heart and spirit why the Korean people – not the Dutch, the Japanese, the Russians or the Americans – are God's chosen people. They know something – from True Parents, from Divine Principle, from Heaven – that we do not know, yet...

Of course, this is a difficult time for Irina and the children. We have to fully support them, and we are. Fundraising drives of various types are underway, and we'll keep you posted of our initiatives. But this is not a time for gloom and sadness; this is a time to celebrate Sasha life – here and in the spirit world. At his Seonghwa ceremony I had a "Kingdom of God" experience, and I hope others did as well. I felt vividly, personally, what the Book of Revelation portrays as the descent of the New Jerusalem: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death of mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."