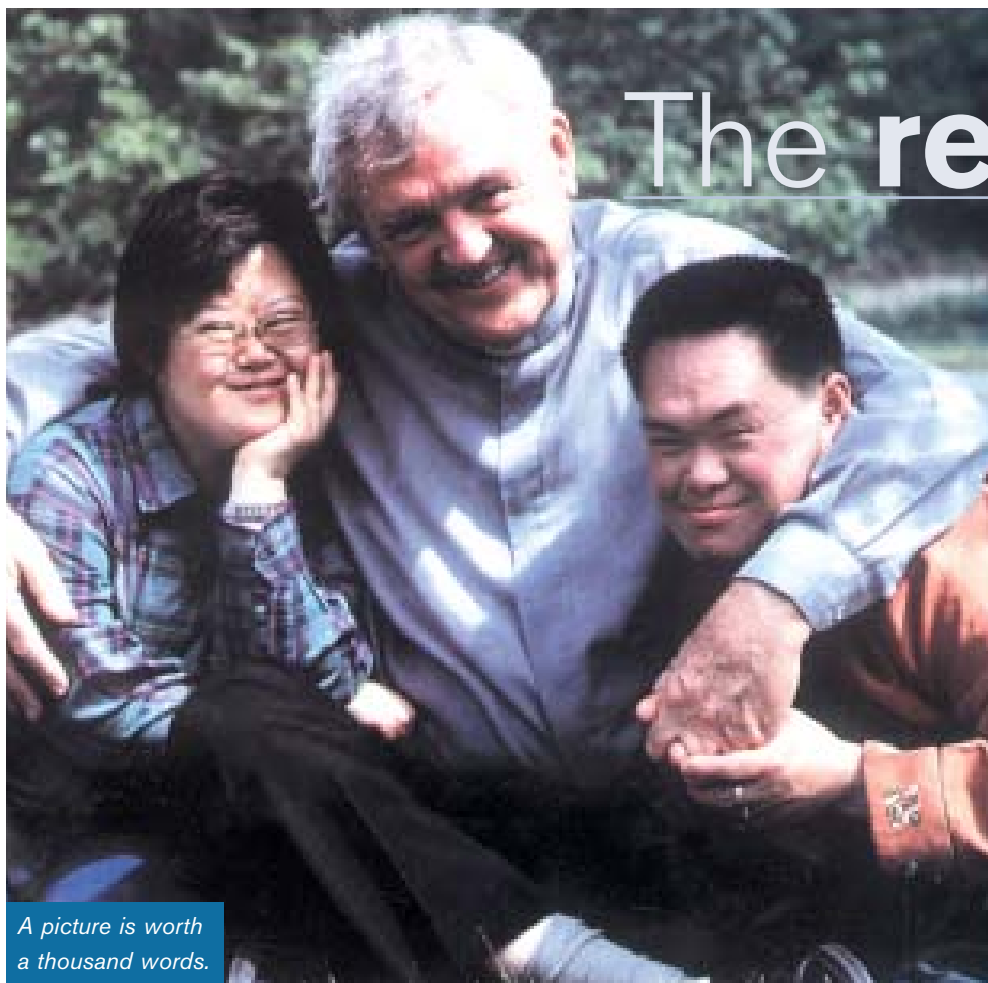


The reunion

NOEL O'NEILL



A picture is worth a thousand words.

Fr O'Neill tells us about a family who found their long lost son.

I WILL tell you about a happy event which happened here at Emmaus in Kwangju City, South Korea. For years the city office has been running a large institution for "vagabonds," those picked up on the streets and referred by the local police station. Many of them are mentally ill or alcoholics. About 40 mentally challenged are among the 300 residents.

Finally after much negotiation we succeeded in persuading the city office to allow us to begin taking out some of the residents and have them live in our group homes and attend our centre.

We began with four, with two coming to live with me at the group home and the others went to another of our group homes. Chi Min, 34, came to live with me. During that time a national TV station came to Emmaus to make a 40-minute documentary about our group homes which took one week.

It was shown on national TV on a Sunday night at 9:30. Chi Min's parents got a surprise when they saw him on TV. They lived about four hours from here. Chi Min was living with

them at home after finishing at a special school.

Then Chi Min went missing. At that time his parents notified the police and searched all the different institutions in their area, but to no avail. Two or three years passed and everyone had given up hope of finding him.

After seeing Chi Min on TV his parents tried to contact us by phone but could not find our group home number, so one night the whole family drove to Kwangju. They arrived here at 5:00a.m. and went straight to the centre, but there was no answer there.

A local was going to work early and they asked him where there was a foreigner living with disabled people. They found where we were and as they arrived Chi Min was coming down the outside steps of the house. I was just getting up and when I heard the uproar outside I thought there had been some kind of an accident. Little did I expect that I would witness the joy of a father and mother in finding their lost son after suffering the pain of loss for so many years.