

DiReSoM

Diritto e Religione nelle Società Multiculturali/ Law and Religion
in Multicultural Societies/ Derecho y Religión en las Sociedades
Multiculturales/ Droit et Religion dans les Sociétés
Multiculturelles/ Recht und Religion in Multikulturellen
Gesellschaften/ 多元化社会中的法与宗教 / القانون والدين في المجتمعات
متعددة الثقافات

Coronavirus cluster emerges at another South Korean church, as
others press ahead with Sunday services

□ DIRESOM



□

NESSUN COMMENTO

31 MARZO 2020

by Park Chan-kyong (<https://www.scmp.com/author/park-chan-kyong>)

- The controversial Manmin Central Church in Seoul, whose pastor Lee Jae-rok is in prison for rape, has been linked to 22 Covid-19 cases
- This comes as many South Korean churches went ahead with services on Sunday, despite pleas for social distancing

Updated: 11:15pm, 30 Mar, 2020 6.3k (<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean&src=sdkpreparse>).

(<mailto:?subject=Shared from South China Morning Post&body=Coronavirus cluster emerges at another South Korean church%0D%0Ahttps://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean>) (<https://www.scmp.com/print/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean>).

Workers spray disinfectant to help curb the spread of the coronavirus at a church in South Korea. A new cluster of infections has emerged at a church in Seoul's western district of Guro. Photo: AP Another controversial religious sect in South Korea (<https://www.scmp.com/topics/south-korea>) has come under public scrutiny with a cluster of at least 22 coronavirus (<https://www.scmp.com/topics/coronavirus-outbreak>) cases, as some protestant churches went ahead with worship services on Sunday despite a government order for social distancing.

Health authorities have been tracing close contacts of at least 200 church-goers after a member of the Manmin Central Church in Seoul's western district of Guro tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday.

As of Sunday afternoon, 22 people linked to the church, including a female pastor, had tested positive.

Infections occurred when about 200 members of the church gathered in early March to prepare video footage to use in online worship services in response to government guidelines for social distancing, according to the Korea Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Pastors wearing face masks and sitting far apart attend a service at a church in Seoul. Photo: AP

Some 70 other members of the church also on March 5 travelled to the southern county of Muan, the birthplace of the church's founder Lee Jae-rok, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his most famous "miracle" – allegedly making the salty water in a fountain drinkable to ease chronic potable water shortages in the county.

Pastor Lee has been in prison since May 2018 after he was arrested for raping nine female followers – some of who believed he was a living god – over several years.

Three of the women went public as South Korea experienced a wave of #MeToo accusations, describing how he had summoned each of them to a flat and raped them. The Supreme Court in August upheld his 16-year prison term. Coronavirus Update Newsletter Get updates direct to your inbox By registering, you agree to our [T&C](https://www.scmp.com/terms-conditions) (<https://www.scmp.com/terms-conditions>) and [Privacy Policy](https://www.scmp.com/privacy-policy) (<https://www.scmp.com/privacy-policy>).

Lee, 76, set up the church in Guro district, once a backwater area of Seoul, with just 12 followers in 1982. Using his supposed healing powers to attract new members, he grew his congregation to 130,000, but his conviction has reportedly resulted in a sharp decrease in congregants.

The church has a spotlight-filled auditorium, sprawling headquarters and a website replete with claims of miracle cures. (<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean&src=sdkpreparse>) (<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=Coronavirus cluster emerges at another South Korean church, as others press ahead with Sunday services&url=https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean&related=&via=scmpnews>) (<mailto:?subject=Shared from South China Morning Post&body=Coronavirus cluster emerges at another South Korean church%0D%0Ahttps://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean>) (<mailto:?subject=Shared from South China Morning Post&body=Coronavirus cluster emerges at another South Korean church%0D%0Ahttps://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean>).

This is the latest in a series of church-related clusters in South Korea, where many churches have pushed ahead with services. The Seoul City government last week filed a lawsuit worth at least 300 million won (US\$247,000) against the [Shincheonji Church](https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3052915/korean-cults-missing-link-between-coronavirus-sewol-ferry-disaster) (<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3052915/korean-cults-missing-link-between-coronavirus-sewol-ferry-disaster>), a religious sect widely blamed for [accelerating](https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3052550/south-korea-mounting-anger-rumours-over-shincheonji) (<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3052550/south-korea-mounting-anger-rumours-over-shincheonji>) the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak in South Korea, holding it responsible for hampering quarantine efforts by dragging its feet on revealing the names of its 200,000 followers. Eunhyui Gang (River of Grace) Church in Sungnam City near Seoul produced a cluster of more than 70 cases, after the wife of its leading pastor [sprayed salt water](https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3075421/coronavirus-salt-water-spray-infects-46-church-goers) (<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3075421/coronavirus-salt-water-spray-infects-46-church-goers>) into the mouths of followers in the belief that this would prevent the spread of the virus.

Churches in other cities – Suwon, Busan, Geochang and Bucheon – also reported clusters numbering up to 22 people.

Coronavirus: South Korea threatens to close churches 17 Mar 2020

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/3075527/coronavirus-south-korea-threatens-close-churches-not-enforcing>

Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun warned that “stern” legal action would be taken against churches violating orders that they must ensure a distance of at least two metres between people at services and check the temperature of congregants. Among the most defiant churches was Sarang Jeil Church in northern Seoul, whose leading pastor Chun Gwang-hoon was imprisoned for breaching election laws and defaming President [Moon Jae-in](https://www.scmp.com/topics/moon-jae) (<https://www.scmp.com/topics/moon-jae>).

Some followers clashed with police as the church pressed ahead with services on Sunday despite a two-week administrative order requiring the church to ban offline worship services till April 5 for violating the quarantine guidelines. All members violating the order face a penalty up to 3 million won (US\$2,500).



South Korea's Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun meets with senior government officials and heads of local governments in Seoul. Photo: EPA-EFE

The country's health ministry has advised public facilities such as religious institutions, nightclubs and indoor gyms to close from March 22 to April 5 as part of measures to contain the virus.

The Christian Council of Korea, an umbrella group of protestant churches, accused the government of "trampling down" on religion, asserting Sunday services are at the centre of their faith.

Pastor Bang In-sung, a reformist campaigner, told JTBC TV: "Most Korean churches are small in scale and if they stop worship sessions for a month or so, it would cause financial difficulties to them."

[Hundreds ignore virus gatherings ban to attend Louisiana church services](https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/3077481/coronavirus-hundreds-ignore-covid-19-gatherings-ban)
[30 Mar 2020 \(https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/3077481/coronavirus-hundreds-ignore-covid-19-gatherings-ban\)](https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/3077481/coronavirus-hundreds-ignore-covid-19-gatherings-ban)

Religion is widespread in technologically advanced South Korea, with 44 per cent of people identifying themselves as believers. A 2015 government survey found 28 per cent belonged to Christian churches and 16 per cent described themselves as Buddhist.

Most belong to mainstream churches, which can accumulate wealth and influence as followers donate as much as 10 per cent of their income.

But fringe groups are also widespread, especially ones that claim to offer a path to material and spiritual prosperity. According to Park Hyung-tak, head of the Korea Christian Heresy Research Institute, around 2 million people are followers of cults.

Religious experts say around 60 people in the country claim to be divine – and some have been implicated in fraud, brainwashing, coercion, and other behaviour associated with cults worldwide.

South Korea has reported 9,583 confirmed cases of Covid-19, according to the Korea Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Source: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean> (<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3077497/coronavirus-cluster-emerges-another-south-korean>)

Categorie: [Asia](#), [Documents](#), [Other Christian Denominations](#) •

[Creato su WordPress.com.](#)