

From Silent Exodus to the Fellowship Hall: The Ecclesial and Ethnic Identities of
Second-Generation Korean Americans in Oregon

by

Daniel Jaewook Lee

Date: ___ January 29, 2021

Approved:



Dr. Tito Madrazo, 1st Reader



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Rev. Dr. Will Willimon, D. Min. Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The number of Korean American immigrants in Oregon has grown significantly in recent decades, yet not much attention has been paid to their faith practices and their participation in the local church. Furthermore, the way that these immigrants view a connection between their ethnic and ecclesial identity has not yet been fully understood. The thesis of this project is that the ethnic and racial identity of second-generation Korean Americans is an often forgotten and overlooked part of their faith identity that needs to be connected in a way that helps them make meaning of their history, their present, and their future. The primary methodology employed within this paper is collaborative ethnography as described by Mary Clark Moschella in *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*. This study involved a period of participant-observation as well as interviews and focus groups with ten individual subjects attending three different congregations in the Portland Metro area.

This thesis lifts up the ways these Korean immigrants view themselves in relation to their parents' generation and their peers at work, in the community, and at church. It also shows the power of being able to tell their story from their own perspective, a lens that brings together elements of both Korean and American culture. My collaborators revealed how important it is for them not only to be inspired to follow Christ in their local churches, but also to receive guidance as they attempt to make sense of their standing as bicultural Americans whose footing in the United States seems to be shifting each day. This bears significant implications for pastors and leaders of the local church in Oregon and the way they lead and minister to Korean American congregants. It also shows the possibilities of the practice of ethnography. Furthermore, the collaborators in

this study revealed a deep desire to be seen and heard not only in the church, but also in their workplaces and neighborhoods. Finally, this thesis aims to give hope to generations of Korean Americans that have for one reason or another left the immigrant church but are still longing for community and connection.

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could not do this. A special thanks also goes out to my second reader, Sangwoo Kim, who brought such insight and understanding as a Korean American scholar to my thesis. My conversations with him really meant the world to me and made me feel heard and validated from someone who understood the challenges of immigrant ministry.

Lastly, there were so many family and friends that supported me through prayers and kind words over the last several years. I would be remiss if I did not mention my congregation and church family who graciously gave me the time and space to pursue this degree. I look forward to continuing to create this wonderful and hopeful future together for the Korean American church.

1. Introduction

10:05 pm. I checked the time before I quickly shoved my phone back into my bookbag. The sky was already dark, and the night air was cool, but being in a crowd of thousands provided more than enough body heat. We had been standing and marching outside for about four hours, and even though there was no sign of the crowd dispersing at any moment, as their pastor, I felt the weight of responsibility towards Paula and John's parents to get their adult children home safely that night. Paula and John are both second-generation Korean Americans who participated in this study, who grew up attending New Hope Presbyterian Church, and whose parents I know well. By all accounts from other veteran protestors, things got "spicy" with tear gas, pepper spray, and skirmishes with law enforcement vans starting sometime after 10:00 pm.

Portland, Oregon has been in the national spotlight recently due to the ongoing protests of police violence and systemic racism against African Americans in light of the murder of George Floyd.¹ At the time of this writing, protestors have been gathering for over fifty straight days in the heart of downtown near the justice building and the federal courthouse. Not long after the focus group for New Hope Presbyterian Church was conducted, all three participants from that congregation reached out to me asking whether or not I had heard of a gathering of Asian American supporters to join in the protests on July 24, 2020. I said that I had, and we decided to go together, though the other participant in this study from New Hope, Sharon, was not able to make it.

¹ "Officer Charged with George Floyd's Death as Protests Flare," AP NEWS, May 29, 2020, <https://apnews.com/e27cfce9464809aa8c91afd74c930bb5>.

That evening was a “eureka moment,” seeing other Asian Americans, members of the “model minority” often silent in the face of discrimination and oppression, silent no longer, but standing together and shouting with other protestors demanding change in the systems of local and federal law enforcement and government. As Korean Americans, we were doing something that we were not supposed to according to the “model minority myth.”² According to the myth, Korean Americans, like other Asian Americans, are stereotyped to be “smart, diligent, quiet, and conformist.”³ They should not do anything that would harm and dishonor themselves and their community. There are ways that this myth has even become a part of the faith identity of many Korean Americans, often conflating success and achievement for God’s blessing and approval.

That night, we were also able to meet a group of Korean American adoptees who had formed a non-profit organization to cultivate awareness, stand in solidarity, and pursue social justice. As I talked that night with several members from that group, it was almost as if we had known each other for years. There was an unspoken bond that we shared, to the degree that we wondered aloud together why we had not met before this. What had kept us apart? They were surprised and grateful that Korean American churches were not just standing on the sidelines during this time but doing their part to raise awareness and to speak out against injustice.

The other realization that dawned on me that evening was that for Paula and John and countless others, Korean American church had become yet another cocoon of sorts, protecting them from the outside world, while at the same time, separating them from

² Daisy Ball, “America’s ‘Whiz Kids’? Ambivalence and the Model Minority Stereotype,” *Sociological Spectrum* 39, no. 2 (March 4, 2019): 116–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2019.1608339>.

³ Ibid.

meaningful connections and relationships. Even for these young twenty-somethings who had grown up at New Hope and were seeking to live out their faith into adulthood, there was a sense of something missing and a need to help connect the dots, while giving them the support to make sense of their place in society and how they were to be in relation to the larger community and world. The one thing that became clear that evening was that there was no going back to the way things were: pre-COVID, pre-Floyd, pre-model minority myth. There had to be a new way forward, a new way ahead.

In a 1996 *Christianity Today* article, authors Helen Lee and Ted Olsen coined the term “silent exodus”⁴ to describe the flight of second-generation Korean Americans living in the United States from the churches in which they grew up, the churches of their parents and grandparents who were first generation immigrants from Korea. The authors used this title because of the alarming number of young people leaving local Korean churches as well as the quiet and almost unnoticeable nature of the departure. Furthermore, Lee and Olsen noted that the next generation of Korean Americans was not only leaving churches behind—some individuals were also leaving faith altogether.

This departure of second-generation Korean Americans prompted everyone involved from church and community leaders of both generations to pause and reflect on what was happening. Even though everyone—including pastors, lay leaders, and congregation members—was looking for answers and solutions, there was no consensus on the right questions to ask. Many were left wondering about the real causes, and—without opportunities for conversation and dialogue—those underlying issues and

⁴ By Helen Lee; additional reporting by Ted Olsen, “Silent Exodus,” *ChristianityToday.com*, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/august12/6t9050.html>.

concerns remained largely unstudied and unexamined. What caused so many young people to leave? Was it due to cultural differences? Generational? Was it something to do with divergent views about faith? Perhaps all of the above?

Today, more than twenty years have passed since the “silent exodus” term was used, and while Korean American communities have been indelibly changed by the exit, there still remains an incomplete understanding of the factors that contributed to this phenomenon. What is clear is that the experiences of this generation of young people were not all the same, as evidenced by the fact that some left faith all together, while others seemingly tried to reconcile their past experiences with their present and future realities by continuing to seek out faith communities. Some have even begun to return to the immigrant Korean church, a recent trend that some have called the “boomerang effect.”⁵

According to a Barna Group study, 64% of 18-29-year-olds who grew up going to church no longer are involved in church as adults.⁶ Anecdotally, that figure is higher in Korean American churches and ministries according to pastors and lay leaders. In either case, it seems that for second-generation Korean Americans, whether they have stayed at Korean American churches, continued their faith at other churches, or whether they have left the church altogether, the road ahead is unclear and filled with uncertainty. On one hand, there is a generation of parents and grandparents who immigrated from Korea and sacrificed for their families and their churches; however, the communities that they

⁵ Helen Lee, “The Boomerang Effect,” ChristianityToday.com, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/september-web-only/boomerang-effect.html>.

⁶ “Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%—But What About Those Who Stay?,” Barna Group, accessed July 31, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples/>.

helped found and build, by and large, are without the energy and the hope of a possible future together with the next generations of young people. On the other hand, for the generation of people who left during the “silent exodus,” many of whom now have children of their own, the future remains unknown.

Though there were several main reasons why the second generation left the church, dissatisfaction with church leadership and the reluctance of those of their parents’ generation to see them as equals were at the top. Despite the fact that these Korean Americans were leaders in their schools, workplaces, and businesses, in church, they were always treated as children by first-generation Korean church leaders.⁷ They left, expecting to be seen as equals with their experiences and identities validated by those outside of the Korean community; however, what they discovered in American society was just as concerning in that “Asian Americans continue to face marginalization as foreigners and face expectations to be culturally different.”⁸ These Korean Americans were born in the United States, are U.S. citizens, and often self-identify more as American than Korean; however, they are seen as perpetual outsiders. This eye-opening realization that the grass is not always greener has also had an effect on this generation.

Furthermore, their experiences seem to reflect the reality that many minorities continually face in that “being a member of an ethnic minority seems to entail a certain degree of exclusion from the national identity, potentially contributing to feelings of

⁷ Sharon Kim and Professor Sharon Kim, *A Faith of Our Own: Second-Generation Spirituality in Korean American Churches* (New Brunswick, UNITED STATES: Rutgers University Press, 2010), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/detail.action?docID=864875>, 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

marginalization and a decreased sense of belonging to mainstream America.”⁹ Religion professor Kale Yu adds that Asian Americans face a “double marginalization”¹⁰ in both American society and American evangelicalism. This marginalization becomes triple if one includes the aforementioned marginalization within the Korean church. The dilemma moving forward is that this second-generation is one that “publicly criticizes the immigrant and ethnic congregations but that resists complete assimilation with American Evangelicalism.”¹¹ Taken together, it seems that this second generation is one that embodies the term liminality, or “the situation of being in between two or more worlds, and includes the meaning of being located at the periphery or edge of a society.”¹²

On its own, the condition of liminality simply refers to a location. To this point, theologian Sang Hyun Lee points out that for some white Americans, they are also “at the edge or margin of that society.”¹³ However, his point is that for Asian Americans, there is something more to merely being relegated to the outskirts of a community or to being on the outside looking in, there is also the aspect of “being pushed there and forced to remain by dominant power structures.”¹⁴ He continues on to say that Asian Americans at the peripheries are “not fully accepted by or fully belonging to, either the American world or the Asian.”¹⁵

⁹ Que-Lam Huynh, Thierry Devos, and Laura Smalarz, “Perpetual Foreigner In One’s Own Land: Potential Implications For Identity And Psychological Adjustment,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2011): 133–62, <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2011.30.2.133>, 137.

¹⁰ K Kale Yu, “Christian Model Minority,” 7, no. 4 (2016): 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹² Sang Hyun Lee 1938-, *From a Liminal Place : An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, c2010., 2010), <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE004626940>.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴ Peter C. Phan 1943- and Jung Young Lee, *Journeys at the Margin : Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* (Collegeville, Minn.: Collegeville, Minn. : Liturgical Press, c1999., 1999), 113, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE002628273>.

¹⁵ Lee, *From a Liminal Place : An Asian American Theology*, 5.

On one hand, this “in-betweenness” could be seen as a challenge with potentially deleterious effects in being a part of two different worlds, without fully being a part of either, especially if that presence at the margins is imposed by those with power upon those without it. On the other hand, there is also tremendous potential in being and doing what few others could be or do as people on the threshold between the familiar and the unknown.¹⁶ This is a sentiment that scholar and activist bell hooks echoes when she writes about the distinction between being marginalized by oppressive structures and “that marginality that one chooses as the site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility.”¹⁷

This is the reason why today, as a pastor and community leader, I am hopeful for the future despite the challenging road that has been traveled thus far. I am also thankful that there are many second-generation Korean Americans who care about their faith and their ethnic identity. For a variety of reasons, in the past, those two identities were often at odds with each other, one emphasized at the expense of the other.¹⁸ I am also encouraged that many Korean Americans are continuing on in their faith journeys and trying to integrate both, despite the past that includes the “silent exodus,” the “boomerang effect,” and an uncertain future. My project seeks to understand how second-generation Korean Americans living in Oregon conceive of their Christian identity, their ethnic identity, and the connection between the two. I also hope to examine the ways that the churches these Korean Americans are attending are or are not facilitating conversations

¹⁶ Center for Action and Contemplation. “Liminal Space,” July 7, 2016. <https://cac.org/liminal-space-2016-07-07/>.

¹⁷ bell hooks 1992-, *Yearning : Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: Boston, MA : South End Press, c1990., 1990), 153, <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE000953808>.

¹⁸ Yu, “Christian Model Minority:”

around faith and ethnic identity, and to look at what practices might be targeted for change and renewal.

As the old adage says, we study history to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. This project seeks to look at the past research on the immigrant Korean church in America and to combine that with participant interviews and focus groups of second-generation Korean Americans living in Oregon to have a conversation that might build up the Korean American church. My hope is that this work can be a resource and a storytelling vehicle that lifts up the stories of these individuals and their churches as they seek to explore the relationship between their ethnicity, faith, and religion on a personal level as well as a community level. My hope is to collectively envision a future together for Korean Americans that honors the tradition and sacrifice of the previous generation of Korean immigrants, while recognizing the changing faith and identity needs of current and future generations of Korean Americans.

2. Methodology

The primary methods used in this ethnographic study were semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Initially, I contacted pastors and individuals with whom I had previously developed relationships over the last fifteen years of doing ministry in the Portland Metro area to see if they had any interest in participating in the study. As people responded, I organized the study into groups of three to four people each from three local congregations: Portland Baptist Church, New Hope Presbyterian, and Faith Church.¹ They were all then given consent forms regarding their participation in an interview and a focus group. The first round of interviews was conducted before focus groups were held. Visits to each congregation were done in between and concurrently to these other meetings. The whole process of interviews, focus groups, and church visits took approximately six months to conclude.

2.1 Considerations due to COVID

Due to COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns ordered by the governor of Oregon, my visits to the three different churches in this study were conducted online through their various streaming services. In addition, all the interviews and focus groups were conducted via teleconference using the Zoom platform. There were pros and cons to this method of participant observation. The first positive was that gathering information and participating in the worship experience was easier. Like perhaps many people during

¹ In order to protect privacy and keep confidentiality, the actual names of the church and participants were not used in this study. More information about the decision to mask the identities of the churches and participants are found later in the methodology section.

the pandemic, I found that accessing a church's website or YouTube channel was an easy way to watch and join their Sunday service.

Secondly, in experiencing these communities online, I was less likely to disrupt the service or change the dynamic through my presence. Of the three communities, only Faith Church kept track of my attendance online. The way they did this was by putting me in a virtual breakout group with other newcomers and a staff person during greeting time. Other than that, my presence online at these worship services went largely unnoticed.

Finally, in terms of pros, the ability to go through the same service again and again was invaluable for me to take notes and make observations. Both Portland Baptist and New Hope had previous services accessible to the viewing public. Faith, on the other hand, used Zoom and did not have a library of previous video recordings of Sunday services. They did, however, have audio recordings available on their website.

As for the cons of participating in these communities online, the most pronounced one was the fact that there was so much information that was not available through a computer screen. Being physically present somewhere is such a different experience than watching a service on a laptop or tablet. My routine when I visit churches is to walk around a little bit before the service begins. I try to look at as many pictures, photographs, pamphlets, and whatever is there to see, in an attempt to imagine what this particular church community is all about and trying to share. On the other hand, I do also think about what I do not see or what is not immediately visible. In many ways, participating in worship online is limited to what the church wants to show and make visible. What is not

visible and what it does not want to share can also be a piece of information about that particular community.

As strange as it may sound, I also pay attention to the smells when I walk into a church building. As a Korean American, church often has meals after service, and so when someone enters the building for worship, there oftentimes is the smell of soup cooking or rice being made in the kitchen. For this project, none of that was possible due to only being able to access the worship service online.

The other downside of participant observation of worship services being done online was the fact that I could only see what the camera chooses to show. It seemed that for Portland Baptist and New Hope their services were pre-recorded and edited for viewing on Sundays. Faith's worship service was broadcast live. Again, for Portland Baptist and New Hope, the majority of the view was the worship team or the speaker that Sunday, while for Faith everyone who was participating took up a part of the screen. So, for two of the three churches in this study, I was not able to see the faces and reactions of the congregation during the entirety of the worship service. Perhaps that, in and of itself, is an interesting topic for further study about the digital platforms that churches use to share their content and what that says about their beliefs and values as a community.

2.2 Demographic Information in Portland

According to demographic information and 2019 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, Asians represent approximately 8.1% of the 654,741 people in Portland.² In the

² "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Portland City, Oregon," accessed September 24, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/portlandcityoregon>.

entire state of Oregon, Asians comprise 4.9% of the 4.2 million inhabitants.³

Furthermore, in the state of Oregon, according to a 2018 study, there are approximately 20,000 people of Korean ethnicity.⁴ Regarding Portland specifically, a 2014 study from the University of California at Riverside, concluded that “from 1980 to 2010, the Korean American population in Portland increased from 761 to 2,403.”⁵

Anecdotally speaking, I moved to Beaverton, Oregon, a suburb of Portland, in 2002 from New York City and was surprised to find more Korean and Korean Americans in Oregon than I originally anticipated. At that time there were most of the things that I would have expected a city with a significant Korean population to have: Korean restaurants, grocery stores, shopping malls, and churches. Almost twenty years later, the number of Korean immigrants in Oregon has only increased as indicated by what I perceive to be a boom in the number and variety of Korean stores, restaurants, billboards, and storefront signs. Interestingly, I cannot think of many new Korean churches that have been planted in the area during that time.

For the sake of comparison, California— with Los Angeles County and Orange County ranking one and two in the number of Korean immigrants in the state—has the largest Korean American population in the United States. According to a 2014 study, there were approximately 39 million people living in the state, and the population of Korean Americans was 478,854.⁶ At the time of the study, the two aforementioned

³ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Oregon,” accessed September 24, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OR>.

⁴ “2018 State Fact Sheet - Oregon,” n.d., <https://www.apiavote.org/sites/default/files/OR-2018.pdf>.

⁵ “Korean American Population Density Analysis By City,” accessed September 24, 2020, <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=3297ab39c5d14a6d88d5d384055405f8>.

⁶ “Census Demographics and Citizenship,” Korean American Coalition, accessed September 25, 2020, <https://www.kacla.org/census-demographics-and-citizenship.html>.

counties in the Los Angeles Metro area had a little over 300,000 Korean Americans living there.⁷

2.3 Use of Pseudonyms

For this study, I chose to use pseudonyms instead of the actual names of the participants. Being a relatively small Korean community in Oregon, the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals as well as the church communities were among the main reasons for this decision.

As some of these issues surrounding race and ethnicity could be potentially controversial topics, I wanted to do whatever I could to ensure the anonymity of those involved in this study not only for their personal interests but also for their professional ones as well.

Participants were promised confidentiality in consent forms, and I would like to think that that helped them answer the questions and dialogue more freely without the worry of being identified or sharing information that could put them in potentially uncomfortable or compromising situations.

Korean culture and society is collectivistic in nature.⁸ As an example, the first-person singular pronoun, “I” or “me,” and its possessive counterparts are rarely used in conversation and dialogue. Rather, it is much more common and accepted for people to use, “we” or “our,” when talking about the self. As such, the whole mindset of Korea tends to focus on group identity and extended family and relationships much more so

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “South Korea,” *Hofstede Insights* (blog), accessed September 25, 2020, <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/south-korea/>.

than individual ones. This permeates to every inch of society in all its norms and accepted conventions. One of the outcomes of this type of community is that avoiding shame and saving face is of paramount importance. In other words, individuals will attempt to bring honor and respect to their families, while not doing anything that might hurt the reputation of their families and loved ones.

For Korean Americans, the same is true; however, there is the added nuance of living collectivistically in a culture in America that is much more individualistic. All this taken together is the reason why I decided to mask the identities of the collaborators. Some of them grew up in the area and have family and friends who could be impacted by their participation in this study. In addition, because within Korean immigration history in the United States there is much transition and moving from city to city and state to state, it does not take that much effort to find common acquaintances or even relatives. That is why among Korean Americans, there is the running joke that for white Americans there might be six degrees of separation between strangers; however, for Korean Americans, there are only two.

One note about the use of pseudonyms is also important to mention. Masking identifying information has for a long time been a given in ethnographic research and writing; however, there is a growing body of research that gives pause to this well-accepted norm.⁹ Given both sides of the argument, I felt that masking the identities of the

⁹ Colin Jerolmack and Alexandra K. Murphy, "The Ethical Dilemmas and Social Scientific Trade-Offs of Masking in Ethnography," *Sociological Methods & Research* 48, no. 4 (March 30, 2017): 801-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124117701483>.

The authors in this article purport that masking in ethnography can give participants a false sense of security and could "reify ethnographic authority, exaggerate the universality of the case (e.g. "Middletown"), and inhibit replicability (or "revisits") and sociological comparison."

collaborators in the study was still the appropriate choice for the collaborators for the previously mentioned reasons.

2.4 Feasibility

What this project is not is a comprehensive, quantitative study of second-generation Korean Americans and their ecclesial and ethnic identity in the United States. Thankfully, some of that work has already been done by scholars all over the country and globe. Rather, this work attempts to connect the literature regarding Korean immigrants and their Christianity that has already been written in various fields such as sociology, theology, psychology, and comparative religion to name a few examples, with the stories of Korean Americans living in the Portland, Oregon area and their respective congregations to see if the trends and existing research still hold significance and relevance for local communities. Perhaps in the future, this project will be able to open up opportunities for conversations between local church leaders in Korean American contexts with scholars to conduct further research that can speak into the lives of their multigenerational congregations.

Limiting this study geographically to Portland, Oregon and in size to three congregations with three to four participants from each one was one way to have a range of perspectives and experiences that added to this thesis. The number of congregations and participants was chosen in order to ensure that the scale of this project would fit the timetable given. An interesting next step might be to study other regions in the country to see how the stories and experiences in this project compare and contrast with other second-generation Korean Americans living in other areas of the country. Furthermore,

as there is a growing number of third-generation Korean Americans, another topic for future study might be to look at how the grandchildren of first-generation immigrants from Korea view their faith and ethnicity. It might prove worthwhile to look at how their views might be similar and/or different to those of the previous generations.

Lastly, the reason for interest in the “silent exodus” was originally because of the number of friends and peers that I had growing up that no longer went to church. Perhaps another topic for future study might be to collect the stories of not only those second-generation Korean Americans in Oregon, but also throughout the country, who grew up in the church but have left the faith or do not currently attend church services. Even though there will be several stories of those individuals at the end of this project, a larger study could be an interesting next step that might lead to more fruitful conversations around how faith and ethnicity are connected for generations of Korean immigrants.

2.5 *What Is Ethnography?*

Ethnography is the primary research methodology used for the purposes of this thesis. An ethnography entails “studying, describing, representing, and theorizing (with a certain degree of particularity) a culture or social world.”¹⁰ Its roots in the fields of anthropology and sociology are most often credited to Bronislaw Malinowski and researchers from the University of Chicago.¹¹ Recently, ethnographic research practices have been used in such fields as cultural studies, psychology, political science, history,

¹⁰ Anthony Kwame Harrison, “Introduction to Ethnography,” in *Ethnography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199371785.003.0001>.

¹¹ Ibid.

and even nursing and medicine. The three research methods that most ethnographers use are “participant-observation, fieldnote writing, and ethnographic interviews.”¹²

Ethnography is qualitative in its orientation, as opposed to a statistics-oriented, quantitative approach.¹³

The use of ethnography for this project came from a desire to listen to the stories of the second-generation Korean American community. As Korean culture is heavily influenced by Confucianism and patriarchal in nature, the voices that are lifted up tend to be older men and those in leadership and with influence. These oft-heard voices were ones that many are already familiar with if they have spent time in Korean churches: pastors, elders, professors. Without a doubt, these insights are invaluable and needed. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I wanted to listen to people in the congregation regardless of their background or experience; young or old, women and men, to understand how they viewed their own journeys and their own stories, without filter or editing. There is a significant amount of literature in books and journal articles about the Korean American community, but I wanted to hear firsthand what the literature did not tell me, and ethnography provided a good fit as a research tool.

Another reason why I chose ethnography as a research tool was because of shifts in theory regarding researchers and the subjects of study. Over the last several decades, within the field of ethnography, researchers have begun to notice in conversations with the subjects of their study, a “gap between academically positioned and community-

¹² Ibid., 6.

¹³ Tito Madrazo, “Predicadores: An Ethnographic Study of Hispanic Protestant Immigrant Preachers,” (ThD diss., Duke University, 2018).

positioned narratives.”¹⁴ The issues surrounding power and access have caused many ethnographers to advocate for a shift in writing style from “authoritative monologue to involved dialogue between ethnography and interlocutor.”¹⁵ Some have even gone as far as to “extend the metaphor of dialogue to its next logical step – the collaborative reading and interpretation, between the ethnographer and her or his interlocutors, of the very ethnographic text itself.”¹⁶

In *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, Luke Eric Lassiter defines “collaborative ethnography as an approach to ethnography that *deliberately* and *explicitly* emphasizes collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process, without veiling it.”¹⁷ He describes his own research journey in the field of anthropology and recounts two specific projects that informed his views about working in and with different communities. The first was a project in a Kiowa community in Oklahoma. He had a conversation with a tribal chairman who previously had had many encounters with anthropologists studying his people. These so-called “experts” had written works that did not benefit the Kiowa tribe, only those outside their community in academia or other anthropologists. Over the course of their interaction, the elder asked Lassiter to consider, “How can anthropology become relevant for our consultants?”¹⁸ The use of the word, “consultants,” rather than research subjects is a noticeable and distinguishing marker of ethnographic study.

¹⁴ Luke Eric Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, New edition edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Lassiter.

¹⁶ Lassiter.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

The second project was a study of Narcotics Anonymous. In looking for consultants to work with, he interviewed “Mike” after a meeting. Lassiter shared that he was having difficulty in finding people and thanked “Mike,” but “Mike’s” answer surprised him. He shared with him that he was not doing this for an altruistic purpose, but that he was aiding his own recovery by helping others get clean.¹⁹ Lassiter walked away from that encounter with a renewed outlook on his own research and a valuable lesson learned that he and other anthropologists, like “Mike,” had a broader responsibility to serve others in their writing.²⁰

This is the reason why Lassiter explains his definition of collaborative ethnography as a shift from “reading over the shoulders of natives” to “reading alongside natives.”²¹ He also mentions feminist and postmodern critiques of the ethnographic process itself that has helped develop more explicit collaborative practices that seek “to more honestly grapple not only with the divisions between Self and Other, between object and subject, and between academic and community-based knowledge, but also with the complexity of representing human experience in an ever-changing postcolonial and postindustrial world.”²²

In *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, Lassiter presents four foundational commitments that the practice of collaborative ethnography is based upon: “ethical and moral responsibility to consultants, honesty about the fieldwork process, accessible writing and dialogue, and collaborative reading, writing, and co-interpretation

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Ibid., 48.

of ethnographic texts with consultants.”²³ The word, “consultants” is particularly helpful in thinking about my relationship with the participants in this study, viewing them not merely as research subjects or the holders of information that I am trying to discover, but as co-collaborators in the learning process that will hopefully lead to a better understanding of the faith of Korean Americans in Oregon.

Lassiter’s four pillars comes from his own experience as a researcher and the challenges that he faced in different community settings. As shown in his examples with the Kiowa tribe and Narcotics Anonymous, they are helpful because they show that in too many instances, there was a gap in the way research was conducted and the benefit to members of the communities studied. Another research study he references produced no product even after a year’s worth of research and a considerable amount of money spent.²⁴ Perhaps, the most discouraging part is that promises that were made to local communities prior to the study were not kept. Lassiter’s modeling of respect for the community is something that I would like to be a pillar of this thesis.

One of the ways I want to ensure that happens in this study is with clear communication with community consultants at every point in the process, including at the very beginning as expectations are clearly laid out so that they will know what to expect. In addition, checking in through the interview process, during focus groups, and even after, will be something that I will do to help answer any questions or address any concerns that may arise. I also hope to be able to use my role as a pastor and leader in this community to help make meaning not only for second-generation Korean Americans

²³ Ibid., 77.

²⁴ Ibid., 82.

living in Oregon, but also for the generations to follow as well. Even his terminology reflects his intention as Lassiter calls those people being studied consultants, interviewees and collaborators, rather than subjects.

Collaborative ethnography also reflects much of my own experience growing up as a second-generation Korean American. The immigrant Korean church was always a place that I felt a special closeness to even to this day, because it was a place where I felt seen ethnically as well as spiritually. My own experience gives me a certain perspective of the relevant issues regarding faith and the immigrant church. In that way, I am very much an insider to the Korean American faith community. However, I also do recognize that my story is not the only story of Korean American Christianity. In conducting interviews with other Korean Americans who may or may not share my experiences, I hope to keep a critical distance and want to approach their stories from almost an outsider perspective.

Walking the line between insider and outsider is an experience that every immigrant faces, which is another reason why ethnography is an effective methodology to study the ecclesial identity of Korean Americans in the Portland area. The very core of ethnographic study is built on the idea of participant observation. Whereas other research methods value strict objectivity and frown upon any influence from the researcher, ethnography recognizes that the stories told in the study include the interpretations not only of the interviewees, but of the interviewer as well. These accounts will undoubtedly “depict the researcher’s perceptions of the picture, and not merely the picture itself.”²⁵ The hope for this study is that it will yield fruitful conversations about the individual’s

²⁵ Ibid, 28.

own experiences as a Korean American Christian, what the future holds for the next generation, and the way that they hold together their ethnic identity and their faith or ecclesial identity.

In *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, Mary Clark Moschella sees ethnography as a methodological tool that can help religious leaders “hear the theological wisdom of the people, wisdom that is spoken right in the midst of the nitty-gritty mundane realities of group life.”²⁶ She shares that ethnography as a pastoral practice involves opening one’s eyes and ears to see and hear the ways that people practice their faith. In addition, Moschella helps frame the use of this research method as a part of the practice of pastoral care. She puts ethnography in the larger context of caring for the whole community rather than simply one individual. That is not to say that that individual care is not significant; however, her use of ethnography recognizes the interconnectedness of people and communities as “the living web(s)’ of life both within and beyond the local community.”²⁷

Moschella and many others refer to researchers as “participant-observers” in the processes that they are studying. The majority of other research methods are designed to minimize or eliminate any influence or bias from the researcher. However, ethnography accounts for the ways that the researcher is a participant in the study while also being an observer, understanding that, “researchers know that our lenses of analysis and our categories are cultural products, too.”²⁸ Moschella also recognizes that researchers

²⁶ Moschella.

²⁷ Ibid.,5.

²⁸ Ibid., 28.

“cannot stand outside of culture in order to study it.”²⁹ This naming of limits for the researcher or participant observer in the study is particularly helpful as it embraces the strengths of ethnography while highlighting potential limitations or blind spots as well.

In addition to naming limits, Moschella adds the importance of the practice of self-study or reflexivity in ethnographic research.³⁰ This is helpful for this study as I consider my role as a participant observer and how my presence in these interviews and focus groups may affect answers to interview questions and relationships with collaborators as well. Being reflective and reflexive will also push me to consider what I bring to this study: my own experiences, ideas, and opinions and how these will influence or interact with the stories collected and the writing process.

Moschella also names the fact that “ethnographic accounts are partial and biased rather than exact and objective.”³¹ Her lens is a particularly useful one for this study because it helps name and acknowledge my identity as a second-generation Korean American and a “participant observer” in this study. Furthermore, Moschella’s work shows how ethnography is a good fit for this study because it recognizes that there is a “diversity of opinions, ideas, and styles”³² within a particular group. Her work emphasizes that differences of thought are not threatening but rather ways to pique curiosity and further conversation and dialogue. For the Korean American community, this is especially noteworthy as within the second generation, giving voice to different

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 31.

³¹ Ibid., 26.

³² Ibid., 27.

opinions and ideas and furthering constructive dialogue are precisely the things that I would like to accomplish in this study.

Another reason why Moschella's work is helpful for this study is because of the way she asks readers to consider how to organize the information and interview data that has been collected. In *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, she talks about how "ethnographic accounts and explanations are better understood as narratives than as scientific treatises."³³ Moschella makes the distinction between a photograph and the actual point of focus or attention in the photograph for a particular researcher or viewer. Do they look at the borders? What do they pay attention to? What is purposefully left out of the picture?

As I lift up the stories of all the consultants in this study, I look forward to seeing what narratives emerge. Though for the purposes of this study, my interactions are limited to an interview and focus group, I hope to honor the diversity of opinions within this group of second-generation Korean Americans. Ultimately, Moschella's framework for ethnography as a tool for congregations is germane to this study because of the way in which it can help communities move forward as "a vehicle for honest sharing about the group's past and thoughtful discernment of God's presence in the group's story, which helps the group get unstuck."³⁴ As consultants shared their stories, several of them expressed a desire to make sense of the past or overcome previous hurts and trauma.

In *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*, Mary McClintock Fulkerson shares her experiences using ethnography to study a church community in

³³ Ibid., 29.

³⁴ Ibid., 36.

Durham, North Carolina. Her work seeks to further theological reflection as she engages with the community of Good Samaritan United Methodist Church as a participant observer. *Places of Redemption* is particularly useful for this study, because of Fulkerson's notion that theology, the study of God, does not necessarily begin with a doctrine or an idea, but rather starts with curiosity and inquiry that leads to observation.

From this starting point, Fulkerson believes that "theologies that matter arise out of dilemmas"³⁵ and are always "a response to a wound."³⁶ The impetus for my project was developed largely from my observations and experience within the immigrant Korean church. Seeing large numbers of people walk away from churches and faith, in general, was something that concerned me. I wanted to learn more about what I considered to be a "dilemma" as Fulkerson terms it, and the best way that I could think of to do so was to gather more information in the stories of other second-generation Korean Americans to hear about the "wounds" they experienced.

Fulkerson also points out that "wounds generate new thinking"³⁷ and that oftentimes, these painful experiences and hurts can spur creativity and opportunities for reconciliation and hope. In her research and use of ethnography, she does not talk the process of healing as a theoretical notion, but grounds her ideas and shows an example of a community in Good Samaritan that has been able to overcome the obstacles placed in front of them, in many ways by listening to the voices and stories of the most unheard and marginalized. I especially appreciated her use of location and place as the starting

³⁵ Mary McClintock Fulkerson 1950-, *Places of Redemption : Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2007., 2007), <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE004806954>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

point for people to reflect upon how the places they are located in can actually shape their communities over time. Fulkerson compares her definition of place to the way that many people conceive of their hometown. It is not just a location on a map. It is the combination of memories, routines, relationships, and stories that have been accumulated over time.

In keeping the focus on how a place may transform over time, Fulkerson writes that “no place is ever a fixed entity; a place is always in process.”³⁸ She discusses the practices and habits of a community and how they often work to shape that particular place. This idea of constant fluidity is one that has salience for the immigrant Korean community in this study especially Fulkerson’s idea of “centripetal forces for unity”³⁹ and “centrifugal forces that direct away.”⁴⁰ The narratives of the collaborators in this study show that there have been many experiences that have brought people together, but almost just as many that have pulled people apart as well.

Like Moschella, Fulkerson also talks about how important these narratives and stories are in helping people make sense and meaning of their experiences, not just as individuals, but as a community. She references Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre’s definition of the word “tradition” as the history of individual stories embedded within a community’s story.⁴¹ Fulkerson again references MacIntyre and his opinion that “practices involve participatory development of a good”⁴² that ultimately

³⁸ Ibid., 35.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 39.

⁴² Ibid.

contributes to the creation of a “communal narrative tradition.”⁴³ It is interesting that one of the practices that Fulkerson writes about in her study of Good Samaritan was gathering around the lunch table for a meal.⁴⁴ That is something that has been a feature and a tradition of the immigrant Korean church. In many ways, the practice of gathering for worship and then eating together embodies a powerful theology for Korean Americans, one that perhaps has not been fully appreciated as seemingly fewer and fewer churches engage in sharing meals with one another on a regular basis.

Fulkerson brings up two questions at the end of her work that have been keys to understanding my study of Korean Americans and their identities: “What can be said about the theological character of this reading of place – what has it to do with honoring the worldliness of an incarnate God?”⁴⁵ At first, the information gathered from Good Samaritan seem to be this irregular and disparate mix of programs, events, and happenings; however, rather than trying to make sense of the congregation and their experiences through historical doctrine, she commits instead to “respect the way situations occur.”⁴⁶ Her keen reading of place and insightful thoughts on theological reflection being non-linear are particularly relevant for this study as well. Instead of looking at theology textbooks and academic journals to study Korean American congregations and their identities, which is also a valuable practice, I believe this ethnographic study could potentially be one that lifts up the stories of congregation

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 233.

members as practical and everyday theologies lived out faithfully in new and unexpected ways.

3. Literature Review

The growth of Korean Christianity in the face of suffering and persecution is a powerful narrative that arises when looking at the history of the country over the last several hundred years. This narrative is helpful in understanding immigrant Korean American churches today. Furthermore, when comparing the dominant religions of Korea, it is interesting to note that for a religion that has had a significantly shorter history and presence in the country than Buddhism and Confucianism,¹ Christianity continues to engage a large proportion of the population today. According to a Pew Research Center estimate for the year 2020, while 46% of the South Korea's population remains religiously unaffiliated, 30 % identify as Christians, while 22% consider themselves Buddhist. Christianity experienced much hardship in its beginnings in Korea.

Both Catholicism in the late 1700s and Protestantism about a hundred years later in the late 1800s faced persecution in their respective beginnings in Korea, though Catholicism endured it to a greater degree.² As a result of converting to Christianity, many new believers faced the threat of violence and even death. The persecution did not only come from state officials and leaders of the ruling kingdom at that time, the Joseon dynasty, but there was also hostility from family members and fellow villagers, who viewed conversion to the new religion as an affront and a rejection of Korean culture and

¹ "Historical and Modern Religions of Korea," Asia Society, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://asiasociety.org/education/historical-and-modern-religions-korea>.

Both Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to Korea sometime between the 4th and 5th centuries, while Christianity had its beginnings in the 18th century. It is worthwhile to mention that while Koreans may not report Confucianism as a religion, the entire culture is embedded in it.

² Kirsteen Kim and Hoon Ko, "Who Brought the Gospel to Korea? Koreans Did.," Christian History | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2018/february/korean-christianity.html>.

traditions. Throughout the country, Buddhist and Confucian principles had become a part of family rituals and thus, “defined the history, culture, and genealogy of a particular family or clan.”³ Despite the efforts to stamp out Christianity through the imprisonment and torture of ministers, the burning down of church buildings, and the surrender and torching of Bibles, the number of Korean Christians continued to grow.⁴

The beginning of the 1900s marked a transition in Korea’s history as the Japanese annexed the country and ruled it from 1910 – 1945. This great upheaval and political uncertainty started off with the initial church and state relationship being “surprisingly friendly.”⁵ However, it did not take long for there to be “harsh and violent policies toward Korean churches and the Korean populace in general” and forced participation in Shinto ceremonies and persecution of church leaders.⁶ During this time, Japan also attempted to commit “cultural genocide”⁷ by erasing Korean historical, literary, and cultural artifacts. Blakemore writes, “By the end of its occupation of Korea, Japan had even waged war on people’s family names,”⁸ forcing Koreans to change their surnames.

Though missionaries and church leaders remained committed to sharing the Gospel with the Korean people, the Japanese state ended up seizing control of Christian churches.⁹ Furthermore, the imprisonment and execution of Korean Christians, destruction of churches, and the seizure of land and property were among the ways that

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 422.

⁵ Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Timothy S. Lee, *Christianity in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 97.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Erin Blakemore, “How Japan Took Control of Korea,” *History*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/japan-colonization-korea> (accessed July 20, 2019).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Buswell and Lee, 102.

the Japanese exerted control over the Korean people during this time.¹⁰ Many missionaries fled the country during this period of occupation, especially as World War II began.¹¹ “It was reported that the Japanese army was planning to massacre a great many more Korean Christians in the middle of August 1945 because of the fear that these Christians might aid the Allied forces.”¹² However, instead of a massacre, on August 15, 1945, the day ended “with the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule.”¹³

Though the period of Japanese occupation and colonization from 1910 to 1945 is still a painful part of recent Korean history,¹⁴ the growth of Christianity despite intense persecution is a remarkable outcome that no one could have expected. According to the Pew Research Group, while in 1900, Korean Christians were only 1% of the population, by 2010, “roughly three-in-ten South Koreans were Christian, including members of the world’s largest Pentecostal church, Yoido Full Gospel Church, in Seoul.”¹⁵ Interestingly, statistics like this one show that there does seem to be some overlap and continuity with a previous trend seen in Korea. Just as the 19th century was one that saw the persecution of Catholics, the first half of the 20th century saw the persecution of all Christians, yet neither period of hardship could stop the overall growth of Korean Christianity.

In the same way that the number of people coming to the Catholic faith grew in the 1800s, statistics seem to paint a similar picture with Protestantism as a whole. Some have noted that “The rise of Christianity in South Korea is intimately related to the

¹⁰ Buswell and Lee, 103.

¹¹ Buswell and Lee, 112.

¹² Buswell and Lee, 113.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Blakemore, “How Japan.”

¹⁵ Phillip Connor, “6 Facts About Christianity in South Korea,” *Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life*, August 12, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/12/6-facts-about-christianity-in-south-korea/> (accessed July 17, 2019).

profound discontent and despair felt by the masses, prompted by centuries of dire poverty, social marginalization and oppression.”¹⁶ This powerful sentiment still rings true to this day and is so salient because it strikes at the heart of the Korean identity, an identity that has been filled with great pain and struggle. Flourishing and growth in the midst of suffering and persecution seems to have been a vital part of the history of Christianity in Korea, especially during the 20th century. The most notable example of this was at the hands of the Japanese and secondly and most recently, by the Communist regime of North Korea.

No discussion of the persecution of the Korean church and Korean Christians would be complete without a conversation about the changes in Korea after the Korean War and the creation of a divided Korea. Korea was divided into North and South along the 38th parallel with the North continuing its Communist tradition of government and the South adopting democracy as its system of rule shortly after World War II. Since the armistice, the economic and political development of both countries could not have taken more different paths with North Korea closing off most relations with other nations, while South Korea has benefitted from welcoming aid from other countries and implementing an open-door policy and a free market economy.

In addition, North and South Korea’s attitudes towards Christianity could not have been more opposite. Most, if not all of the information regarding the growth of Christianity in Korea over the last 70 years pertains to facts and figures from South Korea. However, while exact number of Christians in North Korea may be difficult to

¹⁶ Sharon Kim, *A Faith of Our Own: Second-Generation Spirituality in Korean American Churches* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 49.

ascertain, testimonies from defectors show that Christianity in North Korea is far from dead.¹⁷ In fact, the number of North Koreans who keep their faith to themselves and stay deep underground has been growing consistently over the last half century.¹⁸

Surprisingly enough, animosity towards Christianity was not always the case in North Korea. In the 1800s and 1900s, many of the missionary efforts of Catholics and Protestants took place in modern day North Korea. For example, one of the first seminaries in the country was founded in Pyongyang at the turn of the 19th century.¹⁹ In addition, Pyongyang, the current capital of North Korea, was the site where, in 1907, “an enormous revival – often called the “Korean Pentecost” or the “Pyongyang Revival” – broke out” and “the faith of thousands was renewed.”²⁰

Even before and during the Korean War, all political and religious opposition in North Korea was attacked, and Christians were sent to prison and persecuted violently.²¹ Some estimate that over 900,000 Koreans fled south of the 38th parallel between 1945 and 1953, and call what has been happening in North Korea since, “... perhaps the most thorough elimination of Christianity that has occurred in history, certainly in the 20th century.”²² In 2019, according to the Presbyterian Record, North Korea tops the list for countries where Christians face persecution.²³ The international Christian group, Open Doors, reports that, “Christianity has been driven so far underground in North Korea that parents wait until their children are old enough to understand the dangers of practicing

¹⁷ Hyung-Jin Kim, “N. Koreans Keep Faith Underground Amid Crackdowns,” *AP News*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/a7079dea595349928d26c687fa42a19c> (accessed July 20, 2019).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Zylstra, “Why Christianity.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ North Korea Worst for Christian Persecution, *Presbyterian Record* 136, no. 2 (2012): 14.

their faith before teaching them about it.”²⁴ Also, Open Doors estimates the number of Christians interned in labor camps to be anywhere between 50,000 to 70,000.²⁵ It is not only their own people that face punishment. In 2012, Kenneth Bae, an American citizen, was suspected of carrying religious items and detained in North Korea for over two years for committing unspecified “hostile acts.”²⁶

As one author puts it, “The story of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Korea is, in many ways, a story of competing imperialisms.”²⁷ Any discussion of the growth of Korean Christianity must take into account the recent history of Korea’s relations with neighboring countries and foreign governments. For example, the often-tenuous relationship between Korea, China, and Japan is noteworthy as, historically, these countries have often been involved in military disputes and attempts at colonization, with Korea often lacking the ability to withstand their advances.

For more than two thousand years, successive Chinese dynasties have seen Korea as a tributary to be protected, a prize to be coveted, or as a dangerous land bridge which might convey “outer barbarians” into China. Unsurprisingly then that China should have a long history of mucking about in Korean politics, a history which has often brought it into conflict with that other great Eastern power, Japan. This has seldom worked out well for the Korean people.²⁸

Whether it was China or Japan, Korea has been relegated to the role of having to fend for itself unsuccessfully. However, it was not only China and Japan that had interest

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Holly Yan, “Kenneth Bae: 735 Days in North Korea Was Long Enough,” *CNN*, May 2, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/05/02/us/kenneth-bae-interview/index.html> (accessed July 19, 2019).

²⁷ Michael J. Seth, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean History*, Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean History (Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315816722>.

²⁸ Stuck in the Middle: Koreans and the Koreas Find Themselves in Familiar Territory, *The Economist*, (accessed July 19, 2019).

in controlling the Korean Peninsula. Both the former Soviet Union and the United States played “divisive and exploitative roles” in the creation of North and South Korea.²⁹ Furthermore, due to the tensions of the Cold War, Korea became extremely important to the United States because of its close proximity to the Soviet Union.³⁰ While on the surface, the alliance between South Korea and the United States seems to be a strong and longstanding one, there are many who believe that a relationship of “dependency” between the two countries has continued for far too long.³¹

On one hand, there is little doubt that the United States played a pivotal role in the Korean War as it kept Korea from being overtaken by China and the Soviet Union. In addition, the efforts of the American government to help rebuild South Korea are well-documented. As an example, the U.S. military in South Korea was intimately involved in helping American relief workers and missionaries care for the thousands of orphans after the war. However, there are those that argue that the U.S. presence in South Korea was more self-serving and harmful than it was beneficial for Koreans, adding that the U.S. and South Korea relationship could best be described as “neocolonial.”³²

Through all of these hardships, Koreans were able to maintain a strong sense of pride and nationhood. To this point, Buswell and Lee state that the “historically serendipitous partnership between Korean nationalism and Christianity against the threats of foreign colonialism and loss of sovereignty” provided the context in which “the rise of

²⁹ “From Stolen Land to Riches: US Neo-Colonialism in South Korea,” Hampton Institute, accessed October 31, 2020, <https://www.hamptonthink.org/read/from-stolen-land-to-riches-us-neo-colonialism-in-south-korea>.

³⁰ SooJin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee : U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, [2014], 2014), <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008513227>.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

democracy and Christianity profoundly transformed the political and spiritual landscape of modern Korea.”³³ The authors’ point intimates that a perfect storm of events and prevailing attitudes laid the foundation for and made possible the tremendous growth and boom of Christianity in Korea in the 20th century.

The economic and political growth of Korea and the growth of Christianity have gone hand in hand. After World War II and the Korean War, which lasted from 1950 – 1953, the country was left in extreme poverty. An increased emphasis on finding new opportunities outside of Korea was a factor that contributed to the large number of Korean immigrants that left the country and found their way to the United States following the removal of restrictions on Asian immigration by the Immigration Act of 1965.³⁴ Much in the same way that not many people could have predicted Korea’s transformation in less than a century from being one of the most “aid-dependent”³⁵ countries in the world to becoming the world’s 12th largest economy today,³⁶ the success of Korean immigrants in the United States and the growth of Christianity among these immigrants is just as surprising.

According to recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Department of Homeland Security, and the World Bank, Korean immigrants “tend to be highly educated and of high socioeconomic standing compared to other immigrant groups.”³⁷ On the

³³ Buswell and Lee, 116.

³⁴ Rinus Penninx, “Integration: The Role of Communities, Institutions, and the State,” *Migration Policy Institute*, May 3, 2003, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/integration-role-communities-institutions-and-state> (accessed July 11, 2019).

³⁵ Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “How the Second Generation of Korean-American Presbyterians Are Bridging the Gap,” *The Gospel Coalition*, August 3, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-the-second-generation-of-korean-american-presbyterians-are-bridging-the-gap/> (accessed July 3, 2019).

³⁶ World Development Indicators Database, *World Bank* <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf> (accessed July 19, 2019).

³⁷ Rinus Penninx, “Integration.”

surface, this appears to indicate that Korean immigrants have been able to assimilate to life in the United States successfully. This is no small task, as both immigrants and subsequent generations have had to navigate between two starkly different cultures, their native Korean culture, and the host culture of the United States. As an example, Korean culture tends to be more collectivistic in mindset and orientation while the culture in the United States tends to be more individualistic.³⁸ Often, for immigrants who live in both cultures, the clash between the two and the effects can be significant. To this point, there are many different theories regarding how immigrants navigate different cultural norms and expectations as they adjust to life in their new environments while attempting to maintain their sense of identity.

According to one theory, the process of identity formation is one in which, “These immigrants engage in a process of ethnic invention in which they ‘adhesively’ attach certain elements of American culture to their existing ethnic identity.”³⁹ This balancing act is one that requires a strong sense of what elements are necessary and healthy for both identities, Korean and American. To this end, social institutions like schools, churches, and other community organizations can provide support and resources and can aid in the “integration” process.⁴⁰ Different immigrant groups will vary and have “different patterns of integration.”⁴¹

³⁸ Diane D. Ahn, “Individualism and Collectivism in a Korean Population,” *Claremont Colleges* https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1110&context=scripps_theses (accessed July 21, 2019).

³⁹ Kim, *A Faith*, 7.

⁴⁰ Rinus Penninx, “Integration.”

⁴¹ Ibid.

Over the last seventy years for Korean immigrants, “the ethnic church has historically been the most important social institution.”⁴² For the Korean community, church has fulfilled a number of important functions politically, socially, economically, and spiritually.⁴³ Korean immigrants, their children, and their grandchildren have seen the church play a vital role in developing and maintaining their identity. The church is the “primary preserver of Korean cultural practices in a Korean immigrant community.”⁴⁴ It has been a place that serves as the link to their history and heritage. “Because Korean immigrants see themselves as outsiders in American mainstream society, the church plays an important role in gratifying their need for inclusion, significance, social status, respect, and power.”⁴⁵ Given the growing presence and development of Korean communities across the United States, first generation immigrants have developed a sense of indebtedness to their local faith communities and have grown a strong bond to their fellow Korean neighbors.

Up to this point, the conversation regarding Korean immigration, the role and impact of the church, and identity formation has focused mostly on the positive aspects of this experience, namely keeping contact with the native Korean culture. However, for many, especially second and third generation immigrants, living in between two cultures is not an easy endeavor and one that often involves considerable tension in navigating both parts of one’s identity. Sang Hyun Lee writes the following of the experiencing of

⁴² Karen J. Chai, “Beyond ‘Strictness’ to Discipline: Generational Transition in Korean Protestant Churches,” in *Korean Americans and Their Religions*, ed. Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 157.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Christian Kim, *Korean-American Experience in the United States: Initial Thoughts* (Philadelphia: Hermit Kingdom Press, 2004), 30.

⁴⁵ Kim, *A Faith*, 27.

being in between: “Liminality, or in-betweenness, is clearly an essential part of the Asian American experience. Asian Americans are caught between two worlds. But their liminality exists in the context of nonacceptance by the dominant group.”⁴⁶ The last phrase about “nonacceptance” is particularly noteworthy due to the fact that within an immigrant community, there are factors that immigrants themselves can account for; however, the larger community of networks and systems that contain these immigrant neighborhoods and the dominant group culture or cultures may not always be supportive structures for immigrants. In fact, the recent history of race relations and immigration has shown that American culture has not always been a welcoming place for immigrants from Asia. In fact, at times quite the opposite has been true.

Steve Kang, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, writes that, “The majority of Americans’ image of Asian Americans, or ‘Orientals’ as they have been commonly identified, has fluctuated in accordance with the changing socioeconomic and political conditions of America.”⁴⁷ Kang argues that, over the years, Asian Americans have often been represented as “an alien body and ‘a threat to the American national family.’”⁴⁸ Furthermore, the socioeconomic success that Korean immigrants and their children and grandchildren have experienced has often been used as evidence that racism or discrimination towards Asian Americans does not exist. Along with other Asian

⁴⁶ Sang Hyun Lee, “Pilgrimage and Home in the Wilderness of Marginality: Symbols and Context in Asian American Theology,” in *Korean Americans and Their Religions*, ed. Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 59.

⁴⁷ S. Steve Kang, *Unveiling the Socioculturally Constructed Multivoiced Self* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), 88.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

immigrants, Koreans have often been labeled as a “model minority,”⁴⁹ or a beacon and example of hard work and determination paying off. Among the many insidious aspects of this myth is the blurring of the ethnic backgrounds of all immigrants from Asia, leading to the erroneous idea that all Asians are the same. In fact, “The label ‘Asian American’ captures people from more than a dozen countries who together represent a vast spectrum of backgrounds.”⁵⁰ While it is true that many immigrants from Asia tend to be more successful educationally and socioeconomically, there is a significant percentage of Asian Americans that are also among the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the country where national drop-out rates for these communities can approach 35% or 40% of their youth.⁵¹

What is more, these misperceptions that are often depicted in mainstream media and culture can have harmful effects as they can lead to misunderstandings between racial and ethnic groups. The overall narrative of Asian Americans “as a monolithic, successful minority can reinforce troubling stereotypes of other minority groups – and cause people to underestimate the effect of institutional bias.”⁵² For example, this dangerous “model minority” myth has often been used to pit minorities against one another and to drive a wedge—especially between Asians and African Americans—with the mindset that if Asians can do it, “why can’t other minority groups?”⁵³

⁴⁹ Kat Chow, “‘Model Minority’ Myth Again Used as a Racial Wedge Between Asians and Blacks,” *NPR*, April 19, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks> (accessed July 10, 2019).

⁵⁰ Michael Kraus, “Stereotypes of Asian Americans Skew Estimates of Racial Wealth Gap,” *Yale Insights*, July 9, 2019, <https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/stereotypes-of-asian-americans-skew-estimates-of-racial-wealth-gap> (accessed July 18, 2019).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Korean Americans felt the effects of these stereotypes and myths most noticeably in 1992. The Los Angeles riots were a watershed moment for the Korean American community. After the verdict in the Rodney King case was released, rioters took to the streets to protest. The protest quickly turned into looting, violence, and the destruction of property all throughout Los Angeles. However, it was Korean-owned businesses that sustained the most damage during that time.⁵⁴ Furthermore, “During the Los Angeles riot, the media singled out Korean Americans as the primary group against which African Americans in the area held issues and hatred. The media conveniently disregarded the enormous part of the riot that included white, black, and Hispanic Americans, choosing rather to singularly portray Korean Americans as the oppressors to the poor in the inner city of Los Angeles.”⁵⁵ For many immigrants during this time, survival was key for their homes and their small businesses, and in many instances, there was no time to respond to the criticisms.

However, it was also during this time that the second generation of Korean immigrants identified themselves with what they saw happening to their families and their community. The Los Angeles Riots and their aftermath made people realize that whether they were immigrants or born to Korean parents in the United States, their heritage and identity as Korean was something that connected them together, for better or for worse. For those first-generation business owners and their children, it was a stark wake-up call that the systems that were in place, like emergency services, had failed to

⁵⁴ Kyung Lah, “The LA Riots Were a Rude Awakening for Korean-Americans,” *CNN*, April 29, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/28/us/la-riots-korean-americans/index.html> (accessed July 19, 2019).

⁵⁵ Kang, 89.

respond to their calls for help.⁵⁶ but it was also the time that to many, the “Korean-American identity was born.”⁵⁷ The L.A. riots in their own way seemingly forced both generations of Koreans living in the country to acknowledge that they had to come together as one community during this time of loss and devastation.

As much as the Los Angeles riots provided something that brought the multigenerational Korean community together while providing the country at large with an awareness of this Korean community, both native born and immigrant, to the Korean American community, the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007 offered a tangible representation of uneasy lines drawn between the generations. The gunman, who was a recent immigrant to the United States from Korea, was responsible for what is still to this day the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history.⁵⁸ Kim writes, “It so happened that the Virginia Tech incident exposed the inability of some members of a particular group to cope with life struggles, in particular Korean Americans living within a Korean familial structure encased within the dominant society.”⁵⁹ This tragedy also highlighted the struggle for immigrants and their children to find a sense of identity and belonging both individually and collectively.

Although the U.S. government specifically distinguishes Koreans and Korean Americans in this situation, others are also beginning to ask questions disconnecting into two that which for so long were seen as one and the same. Although immigrants and their offspring find it much more consoling and easy to refer to themselves as Korean rather than a hyphenated identity, Korean

⁵⁶ Lah, “The LA Riots.”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Virginia Tech Shootings Fast Facts, *CNN*, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/31/us/virginia-tech-shootings-fast-facts/index.html> (accessed July 17, 2019).

⁵⁹ Simon C. Kim, *Memory and Honor: Cultural and Generational Ministry with Korean American Communities* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013), 17.

Americans are becoming an increasingly noticeable people with different characteristics than those of their homeland.⁶⁰

What this tragedy highlighted was that—for the generation of the children of immigrants—while Korean culture and heritage were a part of their identity, integrating their place and identity as Americans was equally necessary. And while the church was such an integral place of support for their parents and grandparents, that was not always the case for the next generations of Korean immigrants.

At their best, church communities could indeed provide support and help multiple generations of Korean immigrants integrate both aspects of their identities and assimilate to life in America. Churches could create opportunities where young people who shared similar experiences and struggles could come together and validate one another's identity.⁶¹ On the other hand, if not equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to do so, then church could potentially be more harmful than good. Second and third generation Korean Americans often mention a disconnect between their lived experiences in two cultures and the values and ideals promoted at church. Even second-generation church leaders acknowledge as much as some have “expressed their belief that the immigrant church subculture was dysfunctional because, for the majority of Korean immigrants, the church is not just a religious organization but it is also the primary arena where their identities and self-worth are established.”⁶²

Though this process of integration may at times seem like linear progression, it is important to consider for immigrant communities and for individuals that the steps of

⁶⁰ Kim, *Memory and Honor*, 18.

⁶¹ Kang, 201.

⁶² Kim, *A Faith*, 27.

immigration, integration, and identity formation are not an “either/or” proposition. Kim writes, “Instead of choosing either American or ethnic identities, immigrants may construct adhesive identities that integrate both.”⁶³ This is the space that the Korean American church is currently residing in as an entire community across the United States: how to move forward in the 21st century as contributing members of this society and culture, while not abandoning the distinctives of the native culture.

Recent attitudes among younger Korean Americans towards Christianity have shown a considerable shift and movement away from the faith of their elders. Despite the tremendous growth of the immigrant community and the immigrant church, for the large majority of this generation of people that came from Korea after the Immigration Act of 1965, the second and third generations of Korean Americans that have succeeded them are in many ways different than their parents and grandparents in terms of the way they view themselves and their relationship with faith and with God.

In 2001, Peter T. Cha, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, noted a “sense of alarm among church leaders at how many second-generation Korean Americans were leaving the church.”⁶⁴ In addition, other sociologists and theologians have called this trend of a whole generation of Korean Americans leaving the church, the “silent exodus,”⁶⁵ given the overwhelming numbers of people exiting and the quiet and unnoticeable nature of the departure. The reasons for this “silent exodus” in the United States are varied and complex. However, among the main causes for this trend has been the inability of church leadership to work together despite generational differences. Many

⁶³ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁴ Chai, “Beyond ‘Strictness,’” 158.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

second generation church leaders have experienced the brunt of the conflict and trauma with the first generation over differences in values and leadership.⁶⁶ For example, there are many second generation leaders who have bristled at the overly authoritarian and “heavy-handed leadership style of the first generation.”⁶⁷ In addition, these leaders have often expressed doubt that they would ever be treated as equals with first generation pastors due to cultural norms concerning power and respect for elders.⁶⁸ This has trickled down to their congregations and church members and has impacted relationships in immigrant churches. In addition, questions of commitment and ownership have further separated these generations of Korean American immigrants. This “silent exodus” has caused many Korean American churches to take a good, long look at the future to consider how to adequately address these concerns.

The disillusionment and exodus of Korean Americans has an element that seemingly is connected to the faith and spirituality of Christians in Korea today. In 2010, sociologist Sharon Kim, when talking about the boom of Christianity among Korean immigrants, noted that “The vitality of Christianity among Korean immigrants is directly tied to the dramatic growth and impact of Christianity in their country of origin.”⁶⁹ While statistics and data agree with Kim’s statement regarding the increase and growth of the church, an interesting further subject to study would be to consider if the opposite is also true that the decline of both communities is somehow connected. At the very least, this is

⁶⁶ Kim, *A Faith*, 32.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁹ Kim, *A Faith*.

a topic that deserves some reflection and consideration given that current trends seem to indicate that reality

Over the last several decades, the decline of the church in Korea has been taking place. Despite all the statistics and the increase in the number of Christians and churches in South Korea since the end of the Korean War till today, recently many church leaders and theologians have begun expressing concern that, like what is going on in the United States with the second generation of Korean Americans and their exodus, the same is true of a younger generation of Koreans. Younger Koreans are leaving the church for a variety of reasons, “ranging from Western secularization to materialism to high-profile corruption in the church.”⁷⁰

A closer look reveals an interesting trend at work in Korea where there seems to be a disparity in the attitudes towards faith and religion, specifically Christianity, that breaks down along generational lines. Here are some of the more interesting figures that support this idea:

A little less than 40 percent of those younger than 40 are affiliated with a religion, compared to 63 percent older than 40. Fewer youth attend religious services weekly (24 percent compared to 33 percent of older Koreans), pray daily (19 percent vs. 40 percent), and say religion is very important to them (8 percent vs 21 percent).⁷¹

Even without language barriers between generations, as is the case in the United States, there does still seem to be a gap between those who are older than forty years old and those that are not in their views and engagement with religion. Several possibilities

⁷⁰ Zylstra, “Why Christianity.”

⁷¹ Ibid.

come to mind when it comes to this discrepancy between older and younger generations. The first is that for the majority of those forty years of age and younger, they have not experienced the poverty and struggle for survival that many of their parents and grandparents did in the earlier part of the 20th century. Furthermore, their religious beliefs have never been threatened by the government or those in power during their lifetime. In other words, it is fitting to remember that for the beginnings of Catholicism and Protestantism, persecution and struggle were a part of the experiences of the early converts and believers. In addition, as aforementioned, during the 20th century, the Japanese occupation was such a painful period for Koreans; however, in regard to their faith, that period of suffering also played a role in the growth and expansion of Christianity in the second half of the century.

One of the possible reasons why Christianity has stopped growing in Korea and encountered challenges among Korean immigrants in America is the loss of a metanarrative. For so long in Korea and for Korean Christians, the idea of persevering through economic and political struggle served as the internal motivation for a nation that has endured tremendous obstacles. Now that that is no longer the case, it seems as though Korean Christians are in search of a new narrative to give meaning to their journey.⁷² For Korean immigrants to the United States, the same seems to be true as Father Simon C. Kim writes, “Through the waves of immigration to the U.S., Koreans have created a metanarrative to explain their presence in a new country” with the three elements of “departure, displacement, and resettlement”⁷³ at its core. While the previous

⁷² Zylstra, “Why Christianity.”

⁷³ Kim, *Memory and Honor*, 50.

metanarrative may have resonated for first generation Koreans, the next generations of Korean Americans are still in search for an identity that allows them to be “proud of one’s past in order to be proud of one’s future.”⁷⁴ Lee also adds that, “Asian Americans, in short, are trapped in the wilderness of in-betweenness and need a structure to return to.”⁷⁵ His assertion is that the metaphor of a “pilgrim” is one that is useful for Korean Americans and especially for Christians.⁷⁶

One of the rays of hope in the midst of the “silent exodus” is the fact that second generation Korean Americans are not abandoning their faith, rather they are seemingly finding churches that can meet their spiritual, ethnic, and social emotional needs. “Second-generation Korean Americans are roughly as religious as their immigrant parents, and instead of joining mainstream churches they are carving out their own institutional religious niches in a self-constructed hybrid third space.”⁷⁷ The other two spaces that are noted are staying with the first generation Korean church, in some fashion, whether as an English-speaking worship service or an entirely separate English congregation connected to a Korean church and leaving the immigrant church to join mainstream churches. Current research has shown that second generation Korean Americans are slowly returning to Korean churches that can understand “their needs as a racial-ethnic group and as children of immigrants.”⁷⁸ This has made it possible for these Korean Americans not only to make sense of their own lived experiences, but also to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁵ Lee, “Pilgrimage,” 60.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁷ Kim, *A Faith*, 47.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 81.

connect with other ethnicities and minority groups that can share similar experiences as children of immigrants.

Whether in South Korea or in the United States, what is clear is that the past, present, and future of the community and the future of the church in both places seems to be inextricably linked together. What makes this struggle so palpable is the fact that a sense of belonging and identity seems to be at stake for so many: the aging first generation of grandparents and parents, the second and third generation of children and grandchildren of Koreans and Korean immigrants. So, what does the future hold and where does the Korean American church go from here? Though there have been many peaks and valleys in the Korean immigrant Christian experience, the answer seems to lie in showing grace from generation to generation and building on the legacy and history of sacrifice and commitment that native Koreans have shown and giving opportunity to the next generations of Korean Americans to follow suit. As the Korean American church is able to do this, the future may be unclear, but hopeful.

4. Stories from Three Churches in the Community

4.1 Portland Baptist Church¹ – Missing Korean Hymns

On my first virtual visit to Portland Baptist, their promo video immediately grabs my attention and stands out. It resembles an advertisement to live in the Pacific Northwest. There are so many beautiful shots, a lot of aerial views. The production seems to be professional quality and done well. It displays a lot of scenes of nature in Oregon as well as the Portland skyline and noticeable landmarks. The people presented are laughing and smiling and from diverse backgrounds. There are Asians in one scene with a Black couple shown being interviewed in another. One thought that comes to mind watching the intro is whether this diversity is actually present in the sanctuary or if it is an aspirational projection of diversity at Portland Baptist.

Located in a nondescript suburb of Portland, Portland Baptist Church was founded in the 1960s and is one of the largest churches in the Portland Metro area. When driving by, one can immediately notice that there are lots of single-story houses surrounding the church with an elementary school down the street. In many ways, Portland Baptist resembles a school campus, taking up many acres with a collection of different buildings, some newer, some older. In addition to the main sanctuary building, there are many portable classroom structures all over the property. Interestingly, there is also a Catholic church and community center that is right next door to Portland Baptist.

Of the three churches in this study, it is by far the largest with over five thousand members. Portland Baptist is known for having a thriving ministry with many great

¹ Along with the other two faith communities that were studied, the real names of the church congregations were changed in order to protect confidentiality.

programs and meetings throughout the week on their campus as well as throughout the city. On Sundays, there are three worship services and programs for children in nursery school to fifth grade. For older students in grades 6-12, the youth group worships together with their parents on Sunday and has weekday services on Wednesdays. Portland Baptist is predominantly white, and though there is a sizable number of Korean Americans that attend, it is not immediately noticeable at first glance.

The worship team for this Sunday is also made up of men and women from different ethnic backgrounds, and the speaker for the day is on staff at the church as the youth and young adult pastor. The message about race, reconciliation, and Jesus seems to have been prompted by the killing of George Floyd² and the Black Lives Matter protests that have been happening in Portland.³ One interesting side note is that after a little while, I notice buttons below the video player for translations available in Chinese, Spanish, and Korean. Again, I wonder if these are the most requested languages or if these are the most represented populations in the congregation.

I clicked through to the Korean translation and saw that for worship and praise the songs were presented in their original recordings in English. Like the promo video at the beginning of the service, the worship team and the song that they sang in the beginning was something resembling a video on YouTube. It was well done. However, it made me think of my own experience singing worship songs and hymns in Korean. To this day, there are those songs and hymns that I do not know in English, and though I would

² “Officer Charged with George Floyd’s Death as Protests Flare.”

³ “Protests Grow On 52nd Night As Portland Responds To Federal Officers,” NPR.org, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/19/892771802/protests-grow-on-52nd-night-as-portland-responds-to-federal-officers>.

consider my English better than my Korean, it is almost as if there is another part of my heart that feels differently when singing praise songs and hymns in Korean as opposed to in English.

The other part that really stays with me long after I leave service has to do with the translation. The translation begins once the speaker goes through announcements for different programs and meetings for the upcoming week and for the sermon. The translator's name is Mary, and at first, it catches me off guard. In my time attending Korean church, I can count the number of sermons that I have heard given by women leaders on one hand. In the Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and Methodist churches in which I have participated, women pastors have been rare. Something about hearing Mary speak in Korean as she shares the translation of the pastor's sermon is comforting to me. Interestingly, I cannot see Mary on the screen when the pastor is speaking. I can only hear her voice translating when I click on the Korean translation button. It is like an old foreign language movie, except in this case, the dubbing is in Korean and not English. The service ends with another worship song and the benediction.

4.1.1 Emily and Lawrence – “Chips and Mountain Dew”

The first people that I interviewed from Portland Baptist church were Emily and Lawrence. They are married and are both in their mid to late 40s. Emily and Lawrence both immigrated to the States when they were quite young in elementary school in the 1970s and 1980s. Emily's aunt married a Caucasian man and moved to Las Vegas first. Her aunt was the one that sponsored Emily's parents and grandparents. Many of her family members worked in the hospitality industry in Vegas. Lawrence's family

immigrated to Oregon in the 1970s. When talking about his family, he is quick to mention how poor post-war Korea was. He remembers rolling brownouts because of the lack of enough electricity in some parts of the country. He contrasts his memories of Korea before he immigrated with the current state of how developed and advanced South Korea is today, economically, technologically, and in many other regards. Lawrence shares that his family was in search of opportunities in the United States like many other Koreans at that time.

Both Emily and Lawrence's family went to church when they came to the United States in Las Vegas and in Oregon, respectively. An interesting note about Emily's family is that despite her grandmother being a devout Buddhist, she wanted her grandchildren to go to church. She also mentions her parents were not Christians and that they too wanted their children to go to church. In an interesting moment, Emily tells of a memory of her and her sister hiding in the closet not wanting to go to church, but her grandmother searching throughout the house and making them go.

When I ask her why she thought that might be, Emily mentions that she thinks her grandmother and her parents wanted them to connect with the Korean community in Las Vegas and that the church offered Korean language school and opportunities to maintain a link to Korean culture while living in the United States.⁴ Emily also talks about speaking more English than Korean growing up and how it may have caused her parents

⁴ Kelly H. Chong, "What It Means to Be Christian: The Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary among Second-Generation Korean Americans," *Sociology of Religion* 59, no. 3 (1998): 259+.

For Korean American immigrants, churches have served two functions. The first is to preserve and transmit Korean culture to the next generations, and the second is to connect and legitimize Korean values with Christian morality and worldview.

to fear that she and her sister were losing that connection to Korean culture, thus pushing Emily and her sister to participate more in church, despite their own lack of involvement. Lawrence mentions that church was the highlight of the week growing up from a social perspective and that it was a chance for his family to interact with other Koreans in the area. He shares that it was something that his whole family looked forward to when they settled in Oregon and that it was not just his immediate family but aunts and uncles as well.

As the conversation transitioned to what it was like growing up as a Korean American especially at school, they both mention feeling more “at home” with Asians than whites. Emily talks about not having many classmates that were Asian in Las Vegas and that it was only at church on weekends and on Sundays that she connected with friends with whom she felt more comfortable. For Lawrence, growing up in Southeast Portland, he mentions that there was a large Vietnamese and Chinese community and that most of his friends were from those two groups. He talks about interesting differences between his experiences with his Asian and white friends. Speaking first of his Asian friends, Lawrence says,

“I still have fond memories where, you know, we’d go over to their house. Nothing special, but we’d share meals. Their parents would make us food and stuff. And if I went over to my Caucasian friends, there was no food, but there was cable TV. You’d have to go to the mini mart to buy Mountain Dew and chips.”

Lawrence is not the first person in this study to reference the relationship between food and feelings of belonging within a community and culture.

When the discussion transitions to their children, Emily is quick to point out that even though her children did not really grow up speaking Korean that their friend groups are all Asian. She says, “It’s like they just know,” as she references this unspoken connection and affinity for similar culture and values. She adds that there is a comfort level that goes beyond words. Like Lawrence’s mention of food, Emily’s comment about the unspoken and not having to explain yourself or your culture to friends and classmates is an observation that is made numerous times by multiple people in this study.

As we begin to talk about their current church, both Emily and Lawrence mention how large the church is. Portland Baptist is one of the more well-established churches in the Greater Portland area. They have many different worship services and programs throughout the week. As they begin to talk about church, I cannot help but notice the repetition of the word, “connect,” in the frame of how difficult it is to do that at Portland Baptist. Both Emily and Lawrence mention it as they talk about attending church, but not really feeling a part of the church. Lawrence is not quite sure if it is due to the cultural differences, but he also does point out that there is a sense of burden that he feels falls upon him and his family to be proactive in order to connect. In other words, both he and Emily share that if they do not make an effort, there does not seem to be much follow-up and care coming from church members and staff.

I am not sure if this is something that will come up with the other interviewees in their church contexts; however, I wonder if there is a link between the cultural and ethnic identity piece and a perceived burden and onus to reach out to others. As an example, I wonder if the churches in this study that embrace and tend to recognize ethnic diversity and celebrate the different cultures in their congregation more readily help church

members feel more welcomed or connected as opposed to the responsibility falling on the individuals or their families themselves. As an example, there is a local church near to Portland Baptist Church that has several different congregations within their church that all attend the same service, but with translation available on Sundays and weekly small group gatherings in the language of their choice such as Russian, Spanish, and Korean.

Interestingly, as the topic moves to their children, Emily and Lawrence share that they would like their children to maintain their Korean identity. I appreciate that Lawrence points out that even the definition of what it means to be Korean seems to be changing. He references Korean popular music or K-pop and its influence around the world. He also talks about Korean dramas and the perception of Korean identity that his children seem to view as a positive. Lawrence contrasts that with his own experience growing up in America and how being Korean was not always a positive for him, as some of his classmates did not know what Korean was; only being familiar with Chinese or Japanese.

The last part of our conversation is informative as we talk about their own experience in Korean churches. They mention that they had attended one before going to Portland Baptist. They mention a positive relationship with Korean culture and 1st generation Koreans. They both appreciate the teaching of respect for each other in traditional greetings and customs that they themselves learned growing up. They also mention how an expectation of respect without relationship building can be a slippery slope that can lead to misunderstanding between generations. Lawrence's final comment during our interview brings up an observation that the Korean church that he had previously attended had seemed to extend themselves too thin, trying to do too much,

while not excelling in one area. He mentions his own opinion that church should inspire faith through worship and preaching, but that his previous church sometimes did not excel in those areas.

4.1.2 Bella and Mark - "Mom, There Are So Many Canadians Here."

The other people that I interviewed from Portland Baptist Church were another couple in their late 40s and 50s, Bella and Mark. Bella's family immigrated from Korea to Canada in the early 1970s, while Mark's family immigrated to New Jersey in 1964. The first thing that strikes me is that Bella talks about her parents and uses the Korean term for dad, "appa." In talking about her family's immigration to Canada, she mentions that her dad stressed the importance of Korean identity to her and her siblings. She recalls him telling them that they were to be "superior to the whites," that when they crawl, Helen and her siblings were to walk, when they walk, Helen was to run. She remembers the lesson to always be one step ahead.

Mark's memories of his upbringing center around not being surrounded by too many Korean people. He also mentions that as his parents were busy raising kids that a point of emphasis was making sure that they were well "integrated" and "assimilated" to life in America. He notes that he believes that that came at the expense of teaching Korean language and customs. Mark also mentions that as his own parents aged, they wondered whether they made the right decision in not emphasizing Korean language and culture more.⁵

⁵ Hye Yeong Kim, "Parents' Perceptions, Decisions, & Influences: Korean Immigrant Parents Look at Language Learning & Their Children's Identities," *Multicultural Education* 18, no. 2 (2011): 16–19.

“My parents were kind of a little torn raising us, I think. There was definitely a piece of sort of, um, like integration and assimilation was really important. To some extent, I think that that was part of the idea of not teaching us Korean (language) when we were younger, so that, um, they were worried about, you know, it would hinder your development, learning English. As we got older, they started to rethink that. They tried to change their teaching towards us. At that point it got hard to do.”

As for their formative years and schooling, Bella notes that she grew up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and did not go to school with many Korean students. However, the weekends were spent at church where she was able to form friendships with other Korean Canadian young people. She talks about Bible studies, worship services, and many different programs that kept her active in the church. When I ask her with which group of friends she felt most comfortable, Bella quickly answers that it was at church and with other Korean youth that she felt the most herself. She posits that it was the shared identity and experience of growing up as second generation Korean immigrants that helped her connect more with friends from her church community. She says that they were able to “commiserate” during the bad times and “celebrate” the good times.

Mark’s growing up in New Jersey and upstate New York was different from Bella’s. He did not have many Korean friends, except the children of his parents’ friends. Most of his friends were white, and it stayed that way for the most part until college where he had more exposure to people from different cultures. He remembers gravitating

Kim notes that Korean American parents view speaking Korean and maintaining Korean identity as important for their children. However, the author does also note that parents have a strong desire for their children to assimilate into American culture seamlessly in the classroom. These two wishes are often at odds with each other, and Mark’s parents seem to have chosen to make learning English a priority. It is interesting that their decision is one that puts them in the minority of immigrant parents.

towards Asian groups in college and after graduation and shares Bella's sentiments about comfort level and similar experiences as possible reasons for that shift.

After college and graduate school, Bella and Mark lived in Ohio for several years as Mark finished up a fellowship. They eventually ended up settling in Oregon and began going to Portland Baptist somewhat recently after trying several different churches. Their experience at Portland Baptist is similar to Lawrence and Emily's in that they enjoy the worship experience on Sundays and the church for the most part, but they mention not connecting with the church community beyond that. When I ask about their thoughts on the role of the church and if it should connect people to their ethnicity, at first, they are not sure. However, as they continue to talk, I notice that they begin talking not about Portland Baptist Church, but the other Korean churches that they had gone to throughout their lives. I am not sure if this was an intentional transition or whether it is because ethnicity is not something they think much about at their current church. Either way, I notice that they seem to speak with more energy and emotion about this topic and that they seem to have more to talk about when it comes to their previous Korean church experiences than they do about their present church context.

Bella and Mark seem to be uncertain about the role of the church in connecting people to their ethnic identity and culture. Bella shares her thoughts about her children's generation and wonders about whether or not all of these topics like religion, culture, and politics should be "siloes" or if there can be some "safe interface" between all of these things. They share a funny story about their middle child. When he was quite young and for some time, he viewed all Koreans as Canadians because that was his experience when visiting his extended family in Toronto. On their first visit to their previous church in

Ohio, their middle child turned to Bella and said, “Mom, there are so many Canadians here.”

Upon going back over the interview, I notice that much of our conversation centers around their children and their children’s generation. Without explicitly verbalizing it, their comments seem to intimate that they would like a church or a community that could support their children’s faith development as well as their ethnic identity. It is almost as if they are wondering out loud in this time if things could change for the better for their three children. However, they do not seem to be holding their breath.

“I grew up in the church, and we were always taught ‘turn the other cheek,’ and it’s not about always exacting the same kind of punitive measures that we experienced, but Trent came home one day when he was in middle school and said that some white kid called him a ‘chink’ on the bus. You know, that really hurts. It’s like a knife to the heart.”

They share frustration at having to walk alone through experiences like this one. Not being understood by their well-meaning white friends at church is a comment that stands out when talking about these incidents not only with Bella and Mark, but with other collaborators in this study.

Interestingly enough, much of our time is not spent talking about Portland Baptist per se, but about the shortcomings of the immigrant Korean church in the different places that Bella and Mark have lived. Throughout the interview, there is an underpinning of disappointment as Bella and Mark talk about the Korean churches that they were a part of in the past. They mention things like hierarchical leadership stifling the growth and evolution of the ministries of their own generation. They bring up differences in mindset

between generations in a Korean church and even talk about how finances have led to disagreement and conflict.⁶

Overall, Bella and Mark view being Korean as a positive. They talk about shared experiences with the Korean community and a comfort level that goes beyond words. They also mention that at their Korean churches the “shared experience of fellowship without societal barriers” made the experience much easier to feel engaged and a part of the community. However, as they talk about their other experiences in the Korean church, there is a sense of a missed opportunity. Their tone is measured but honest, and moving forward and for their children, it seems as though they are not overly optimistic that things could be different.⁷

4.2 Faith Church – Eating Seaweed Soup and Kimchi

Faith is a non-denominational church that was founded about ten years ago in Portland, Oregon. Their meetings are held in a local elementary in a quiet residential neighborhood. Though located in a different part of town than Portland Baptist Church, in some ways, the neighborhoods where both of these churches are located are surprisingly similar, with the one big exception being that Portland Baptist has its own buildings, while Faith rents space inside the elementary school.

⁶ Sharon Kim, *A Faith of Our Own: Second-Generation Spirituality in Korean American Churches* (New Brunswick, UNITED STATES: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 27-28, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/detail.action?docID=864875>.

Kim’s research suggest that many of the younger generation feel as though they are being treated as “second-class citizens” and that their needs were seen as inferior and not as important as the first generation. Kim goes as far as to call this church subculture, “harmful and dysfunctional.”

⁷ Originally, a Portland Baptist focus group was planned with the four collaborators of the interviews; however, due to a change of heart, Emily and Lawrence responded that they did not feel comfortable participating in the focus group.

One of the first things I notice right away is their intentionality in using the word “community” in their literature and on their website. They often refer to themselves as “Faith” or “Faith Community,” but never “Faith Church.” Though they have a short history, the church is actively engaged with partnerships with many different organizations through the city of Portland. One of its main points of emphasis and core values is to seek the thriving of the city and all its people. On their website, they state that they desire to be an “authentic community” that makes Jesus known so others can know him. Faith’s congregation is multicultural with a majority of Asian American members. Korean Americans make up one of the larger parts of the membership. Faith has a children’s ministry that goes from nursery school to 5th grade, and currently, there is not a youth program for middle school and high school students. All services and meetings are conducted in English and weekly attendance averages about one hundred twenty people.

Due to COVID-19, I have noticed churches trying new things and thinking about the best way to conduct worship services in digital spaces. Portland Baptist Church records their service and streams it via their website and YouTube channel. Another option that several churches in the Portland area, including Faith, are choosing is to hold Sunday worship services over Zoom. With a church the size of Faith, I would imagine that this would be much easier and more feasible to facilitate than a larger church like Portland Baptist. Like with many Zoom meetings during the pandemic, after the moment that it takes to enter the service, I immediately feel the pressure to turn on the video and show my face. Almost everyone on the video chat has their video screens on, and I notice that most of the people on the call seem to be Asian. Along with the faces on the screens, there are the names of all the attendees, a display feature on Zoom on the bottom right

of everyone's screen. I cannot help but notice that along with the faces, the displayed names show that most people seem to come from an Asian background. There are a good mix of individuals and families in this particular morning's worship.

As the virtual service begins, the worship leader leads everyone in a song that is not recognizable to me and to the others on the call, as indicated by their lack of participation in singing. Then, an Asian woman greets and welcomes everyone. She goes over announcements and catches everyone up on what is happening in the church this week. She emphasizes that Faith is there to be in connection with one another and the larger community. She uses the word, "intentional" several times, and it seems that her wording is exactly the mission statement of the church found on its website. She then lets everyone know that there will be a time of greeting and getting to know each other a little more.

From the beginning of the service, I notice that there is an Asian male who is the administrator of the call whose screenname is just "Faith Community." I meet him as everyone is split up into breakout rooms. He is in charge of welcoming newcomers and connecting with them, and though there are several individuals and families in the breakout room, I am the only newcomer that week. I am unsure what I expected; however, the greeting time seems to go on forever. When I looked back at my watch, seven minutes had gone by before we all joined the large group meeting again. Perhaps, it is due to the fact that compared to Portland Baptist Church, there is a bit more onus on the visitor to engage with the community during worship. After several minutes, we all congregate back to the large group and partake in communion. The pastor is a male in his thirties and seems to be of Asian descent. The communion time

leads into the sermon, and for this week, the pastor shares about life's rhythms and more specifically about sacrifice and giving. I cannot help but notice that the length of the sermon at Faith is about 42 minutes long, significantly longer than at Portland Baptist by about 12 minutes. After the sermon there is one last worship song followed by prayer and benediction.

4.2.1 Susan and Brian - "Never Bringing That Up Again"

Susan and Brian are married and in their early and mid 30s. They have been attending Faith for several years along with their four-year old daughter. Susan's grandmother on her dad's side was the first to immigrate to the States. She uses the Korean word for grandmother, "halmoni," and "appa" for dad when describing their journey to the San Jose area of California. Susan describes how much of a struggle it was for her family when they first moved from Korea. She talks about living all together in one home and about her dad working graveyard shifts to make ends meet.

Brian's grandmother was the first to immigrate in his family. She was a nurse in Korea and participated in an exchange program in the United States and came first to Dallas, Texas. He talks about how his grandmother worked two or three jobs to send money over to the family. It is interesting to hear Brian's story start with the matriarch of the family. Korean culture tends to be highly patriarchal,⁸ and I cannot remember hearing many stories of women in the family immigrating to the States to provide as in the case of Brian's grandmother. He goes on to share that the rest of the family came over in the

⁸ Boo Jin Park, "Patriarchy in Korean Society: Substance and Appearance of Power," n.d., 43.

mid 1970s and worked jobs in the service industry before saving up to buy their own businesses. He says that that was the only way to do it because they did not speak the language.

Brian then begins talking about his mother and her experience growing up in the States. He talks about how she went to high school in rural Texas and recounts her stories of being a student and being a waitress at the same time to help provide for the family.

Brian shares that she was the only Asian person in her school at that time and says:

“My mom in school had kids coming up to her and touching her skin and her hair to see if her hair was real, you know, jet black, in Texas was stuff that they’d never seen before, a person they’d never seen before.”

As Brian talks about this, I remember a friend from college sharing a similar story about going to rural Ohio for a business trip in the mid 1990s and being pointed at by a child who had never seen an Asian before, asking their mother, “What is that?” Though their stories are separated by almost twenty years and about a thousand miles, I am reminded that these things actually happened to immigrants as they moved to the United States, as difficult as that may be to believe.

After several years in elementary school, Susan moved to Oregon where she says she got connected to a Korean church that not only introduced her to friends, but also was the place where she learned the Korean language as well.⁹ Susan recalls feeling much more comfortable at church and around other Korean Americans than at school. She talks

⁹ Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, “Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 1 (1990): 21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1387028>.

What Susan mentions is common for many Korean immigrant churches. In addition to providing religious education, teaching Korean language is also seen as vitally important.

about being made fun of at school for having “ching chong eyes” and being asked if she was related to Bruce Lee. She talks about feeling different than the other students at school and not understanding their humor. This continued throughout high school where Susan’s closest friends were Korean Americans who could understand each other and share culture together.

Brian recalls growing up in rural Texas where there was not a lot of diversity. He remembers that he was the only Asian in elementary school and shares about the following incident:

“I remember very specifically in the second grade. We were living in like a rural part of Texas, and I was the one Asian in the school. There was this new, Chinese little girl, an exchange student that came to the school, and nobody could understand her. So, they brought me into the office to try to translate, and I was like, ‘Are you serious? I don’t understand what she is saying either.’”

Brian also recalls growing up and being paddled back when that was still allowed. In his memory, he was oftentimes the only one singled out and punished when altercations happened on the playground or in the classroom. It is at this point that Brian shares that his biological father was Chinese but that he did not have a relationship with him. He says that his stepfather is Korean, and that is why he considers himself Korean to this day.

Brian talks about his struggle fitting in anywhere; not fitting in with Koreans who reminded him that he was mixed race, and not fitting in with white students either. Brian talks about playing sports with “a huge chip on his shoulder” as he found a “refuge” in playing football, basketball, and soccer. He shares that he was able to create his own

identity on the field or on the court, something that was so helpful to him as he did not feel that he belonged anywhere.

When the conversation transitions to talking about church, Susan and Brian share that they are still in the process of sorting through their connections at Faith. They mention that they attend their “missional communities”¹⁰ that meet on Wednesdays for dinner and other activities and that they are a part of men’s and women’s group that meet periodically. Susan also serves on the worship team, and Brian helps out with the media team once a month. Despite all these engagements with Faith, they both mention feeling at times “disconnected.”

They share that Faith is approximately 50% Asian with the majority of the rest being white. However, when asked to pinpoint what the challenges are being Korean American, they point to the fact that not having a building to call their own presents challenges for the church community. Susan and Brian talk about sometimes feeling like a “commuter” church where everyone just meets together for service on Sundays and then splits up. They mention that the members of the congregation live all over Portland and that some people live as far as an hour away from them, making it hard to get to know others. They also talk about life stages and having a difficult time in finding

¹⁰ Justin G. Wilford, “Purpose Driven Places: Small Performances in Big Churches,” in *Sacred Subdivisions* (NYU Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814725351.003.0005>.

As churches in the United States have grown, smaller groups where congregants can gather throughout the week and develop more intimate and closely connected relationships have become more necessary. As Wilford discusses in using Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California as an example, these smaller communities are places where people can come and experience the church in a different setting, often in people’s homes.

Wilford continues to note that many pastors trace these smaller communities and groups back to the early 1st century church and view these small groups as the “most authentic expression of Christianity.” In addition, more recently, these missional communities can trace their roots back to the 1980s where adult Sunday school and Bible study groups were offered to learn more about God in an additional space other than the Sunday worship service.

couples with children in the same life stages as they are. In some ways, they mention that it is easier to connect with the single Asians in the church because those who are single are able to reach out and meet up more frequently and easily.

In many ways, Susan and Brian's experiences with first generation Koreans and the Korean church community are polar opposites. Where Susan found comfort, support, and had a positive relationship with the larger Korean community, Brian's experience was one of being judged and shamed for not being fully Korean. He shares stories of his family having to leave Korean churches because of the stigma of his mother's divorce and him not being fully Korean. Or other church leaders using that information as leverage to vote a certain way in church matters or to exploit their family financially. He also tells of wanting to go on missions, but not doing so in his youth because his name differed from his mother's and that might have drawn unwanted attention to their family.

Though they have had two very different experiences with Korean culture and Korean church, Susan and Brian both express how important their Korean identity is to them. They share that they both value being Korean and American despite all the challenges that come with that.

One of the things that shows the importance of being Korean for them can be seen in how they want to raise their daughter. Susan and Brian have a four-year-old daughter. They both share that they would like her to grow up knowing Korean culture as well as being able to speak the language. Susan adds:

“I already fear that she doesn't get enough exposure though. We don't want that to get lost. The longer the families are here (in America) the more likely that culture, the heritage, the morals, whatnot gets lost over time. We want to try maintain it as long as we can, but that also starts with me.”

The last part of our time together centers around asking their thoughts about the role that Faith Church plays in keeping them connected to Korean identity and culture. Susan shares that despite going to a predominantly Asian, multicultural church that it has been challenging and awkward at times when talking about difficult topics like racial tensions and differences. She mentions that she originally thought going to a predominantly Asian church would be much more comfortable being around people that understand each other culturally. However, she shares that it has actually been the opposite. Susan uses the word “trickier” when describing the relationship dynamics at Faith given the large number of white people in the community.

Brian also mentions that at Faith there tends to be diversity in ethnic backgrounds among the women, but not the men. He talks about how the women are from Asian American backgrounds, while the men are predominantly white. He mentions “missed opportunities” in their church not creating a space or opportunities to explore their ethnic identity. Brian brings up a moment that still stays with him and Susan. He talks about a prayer meeting a while ago where his missional community was sharing requests with one another.

“I think there’s an acceptance but there’s not an embracing, not an understanding. I remember one time we were in an mc (missional community). We were going through struggles and prayer requests, and I started talking about some of the struggles I had in my career and what not from my perspective as a Korean, Asian American and you could tell, it was either super uncomfortable because it was not a topic that they’re comfortable talking about or it’s just something they’ve never had to consider before. It was at that point, I was like, ‘Oh, ok, I’m not sharing much anymore.’”

As Susan is listening to Brian share this moment, I notice her head nodding and her verbal responses especially at the last comment of almost vowing never to bring up race again. It seems as though this conversation is one that they have had before many times concerning not only this prayer meeting but also what it means to be Korean American at Faith.

In the last moments of our time together, Susan and Brian share that despite some of the challenges that they have experienced when it comes to bringing together their faith and ethnicity, they remain hopeful that things can be better at Faith Church. They appreciate the freedom that the leadership has given to its volunteer leaders. However, they talk about feeling a bit isolated and wanting more follow-up from their leaders. They also mention wanting more opportunities to check in and connect with other church members. They are thankful for the willingness to talk about issues of race and ethnicity; however, they point to the next step of moving from conversation to actively engaging, understanding, and standing together even though there may be differences in ethnicity and background.

Lastly, Brian brings up his own hope for Faith as well as the churches in the area that they could be like “cultural centers that provide outreach.” He brings up his love of sports again and talks about seeing youth organizations that support kids in the community. He dreams of Faith being a place like that where the community can come and belong. Susan and Brian both talk about the importance of sharing a meal together. They mention their fond memories of food being served after service at Korean churches and talk about how powerful those moments of breaking bread and building relationship can be.

4.2.2 June – I Am the Hyphen

June is single and in her late 20s. She has been attending Faith for a little over a year. June's grandfather was the first in her family to immigrate to New York in the 1950s. In that regard, her family immigrated much earlier than most other Korean Americans. Her grandfather was in business and also went on to get his doctorate from Georgia Tech University. Her dad grew up as a 1.5 generation Korean American and even attended elementary school in the United States. She mentions that her mom immigrated later on after she met her dad.

June grew up in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan and says she did not associate much with Asians.

“I didn't hang out with a lot of Asians. There was an Asian community, but I think I really almost wanted to disassociate myself from being Asian growing up and like wanted to be more white, so I had a lot of, I was friends with Asians, but my closest friends were usually non-Asian.”

Golf was a big part of June's life growing up. She won a state championship in Michigan and went on to play collegiately at Princeton. She says that she did not grow up going to church but that later on after she left for college, her mom began attending for social reasons.

Looking back now, June shares that her dad's immigrant experience and his story of life in America growing up as a Korean American influenced her own story. She mentions that he was bullied in New York quite a bit and that caused him to develop a toughness and a hard-working mentality that was passed onto her. She grew up thinking

she had to do well to succeed and that she had to be perfect in every endeavor, academic and otherwise. Anything less than perfection was not acceptable.

June talks about college being a big turning point in her life. Even after getting to Princeton, playing on the golf team, and having all these achievements, she talks about facing an identity crisis and being burned out by everything. She shares that she quit the team and began to struggle with an eating disorder and other mental health issues. June says that at that time she kept on wondering and asking herself, “Who am I?”

This identity crisis ended up leading her to take a break from college and discovering faith. Through some friends, June talks about being introduced to Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and going to Hawaii for a discipleship program. For some reason, she shares that she became convinced that as she was looking for answers, “This Jesus person is where I’ll find what I’m looking for.” She also shares that at that time, she found herself wanting to learn more about her heritage and what it means to be Korean. June discloses being the victim of underlying racism in college and experiencing microaggressions such as people saying to her, “I can’t tell you (Asians) apart.” Those moments all combined together served as a realization that no matter how hard she tried she would never be white—no matter how good her grades were or how successful she was on the course.

After returning from her time away, June got plugged into the Asian American Christian group on campus and began taking Korean language and culture classes in school. As she became more engaged in her faith, she took some time to find a church that fit her. She says that she realized that she was looking for a church that was not all “homogenous” when it came to race. June shares that even to this day, one of the reasons

she chose Faith was because it was “half Asian and half other.” She enjoys that balance and not feeling like “the other.”

After college and graduate school, June began working at Nike whose headquarters is in Beaverton, Oregon, a suburb of Portland. It is clear that June is passionate about issues related to race and ethnicity and being at Nike has only reinforced her values and desire to speak up about her place and identity as an Asian American. She shares that she is active in Asian American advocacy work and that she is a part of an Asian employee resource group and part of a large internal marketing campaign called “REPRESENT.”

June brings up the fact that even at a global company like Nike, issues of equity and fairness are not as discussed as they should be. She points out that she is a “double minority” in that she is a woman and a minority. However, the whole point of the campaign was to be proud of who you are, and she is proud of her efforts to change the culture at Nike. She even shares the link to the internal video and asks that I watch it with her.

“I represent the hyphen in Korean-American. I talked about how growing up I felt like I didn’t belong. I looked Korean but wasn’t really Korean, and I felt American culturally but never was treated as a full American. I struggled so much trying to find my place, but growing up, I realized like this in-between space is a strength and the opportunity to be a part of two cultures and be proud of both of them.”

She continues by sharing how it is a struggle to fight against the stereotypes and perceptions of Asian Americans in the workplace as an “invisible minority”¹¹ and the

¹¹ “The Invisible Minority | Opinion | The Harvard Crimson,” accessed July 3, 2020, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2003/1/17/the-invisible-minority-last-month-tony/>.

“perpetual foreigner.”¹² June is doing what she can at work to have a voice, a platform, and to bring visibility to issues that are clearly close to her heart.

When the conversation turns to Faith Church, she says that her sharing about issues of racial identity and ethnicity in her missional community is often not met with the same passion that she brings to the conversation. I notice that she quickly offers up that perhaps it is because everyone has different ideas of what these smaller group gatherings are for; however, I cannot help but connect her comments to what Brian said as well when it comes to talking about being Korean American. In fact, both June and Brian use the word, “awkward,” to describe people’s reactions when they have shared about issues related to race and ethnicity. June says that she wants to “elevate the Asian American voice,” but for whatever reason, that has not gotten much traction at Faith Church.

The last part of the time with June ends with talking about the future of the Korean American church and envisioning what that could look like. She says that being a sociology major in college really shaped her thinking about issues related to race and ethnicity. That together with her faith journey during and after college has helped her think about what parts of growing up Korean American have been valuable to her and her community and what parts have not. She shares that she hopes that Korean American church could be a place that does not simply preserve cultural values like patriarchy but that they could a place of wisdom that discerns between what God is saying and what Korean culture might be saying. She adds her opinion that there are many good values in

¹² Huynh, Devos, and Smalarz, “Perpetual Foreigner In One’s Own Land: Potential Implications For Identity And Psychological Adjustment.”

Korean culture like respect for elders but recognizes that these values could be harmful if preserved in a certain way. June wishes that church could be a place that allows Korean Americans to be proud of who they are in a way that is not prescriptive.

When asked to elaborate more, June mentions something that has been brought up by multiple people in interviews and that is how special eating Korean food is together at church. Traditionally in America over the years, in the Korean church, meals are served after worship services. These times of eating together have built communities and helped grow congregations.

June talks about several times how much she misses eating Korean food. She says one of the things she does not experience going to Faith is being able to eat comfort food like seaweed soup and kimchi, perhaps the most iconic and well-known Korean dish. Her comments indicate her opinion that in many regards, Korean churches still fill a needed gap for immigrants and the next generations of Korean Americans.

4.2.3 Faith Focus

Several weeks after individually meeting together for interviews, June, Susan, and Brian met up together for a focus group to look back over some answers and add some additional thoughts that they might have had after their interviews. Brian begins by sharing about the role of the church:

“I’m not sure exactly what the role of church should be, but I wish that there could be some sort of recognition of this ‘lost’ generation of Korean Americans who don’t feel fully Korean or fully American. There seems to be a lot of people, especially kids and young people, who feel like they don’t belong anywhere.”

He shares his hope that the church could be a place of healing and helping Korean Americans appreciate their identity while putting it into a healthy context. When asked to share more about that last comment, Brian talks about valuing Korean identity without “idolizing” it.

This is a point that June brings up as well. She references Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s comment that 11 AM on Sunday is the most segregated hour of the week¹³ and talks about how much she appreciates seeing the church involved in racial reconciliation work. She wonders if due to what is going on with COVID-19 people have realized the importance of allies.

“I think that there’s this bigger push for Asian Americans to step up and speak out against injustice. Part of our culture is being silent, but like it’s interesting to see Asians speak up for Black Lives Matter, but when it comes to discrimination against Asians, they’re silent again.”

Though for most of the interview and focus group, Brian has seemed to wrestle with thinking about the church’s role in talking about race and discrimination. He brings up his belief that the church should sit “above” politics but in doing so, it has not fully realized the influence that it has and ended up showing a lack of empathy and compassion for those who are struggling with issues of race and ethnicity. He specifically points out how important church leadership is in facilitating these conversations.

June ends the time talking about their own Faith community and its efforts to do just that. She adds that oftentimes communities of color fail to address their own bias and

¹³ “11 A.M. Sunday Is Our Most Segregated Hour”; In the Light of the Racial Crisis, a Christian Leader Assays ‘the Structure and Spirit’ of the Nation’s Churches, and Asks Some Probing Questions. - The New York Times,” accessed July 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/08/02/archives/11-a-m-sunday-is-our-most-segregated-hour-in-the-light-of-the.html>.

racism. She remembers that Faith did something like a panel that fell “really flat.” She wonders aloud what churches are actually doing about discrimination or inequality. June says that she has been a part of many conversations and moderated panels, but that it seems to just end there. She shares that she would like to see more change in behaviors and actions rather than just “nice little sermons and a moderated panel” with no real change.

4.3 New Hope Presbyterian Church¹⁴- Being the Bridge

New Hope Church is an immigrant Korean church founded in Beaverton, Oregon in 1990, roughly around the time that the “silent exodus” term was beginning to be used. The church is Presbyterian and started as a ministry completely comprised of first-generation immigrants from Korea. However, as time passed, the need for ministries and programming in English began to become apparent as children of these immigrants grew from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. In the early 2000s, an English-speaking congregation was founded as a ministry of New Hope Church.

Almost hidden behind a post office that sits at the corner of a busy intersection, New Hope is located in a suburb of Portland. The several buildings that comprise the church campus are next to a set of rarely used railroad tracks and an adjacent street that runs parallel to a busy thoroughfare. There are gas stations, apartment complexes, a 7-11, a Mexican bakery, a marijuana dispensary, a hardware shop, and several taco stands all visible from the church property. In addition to the Korean font and writing on the

¹⁴ I am currently the pastor of the English-speaking congregation at New Hope Presbyterian Church.

signage of the church, I see store signs written in Spanish, Chinese, and English nearby. It is not uncommon to see many people walking along the street on a given day, to get to and from stores and businesses in the area.

Though there are similarities with the two other churches in this study, New Hope is the only one that has both a Korean-speaking congregation and an English one. It is also of note that their Korean congregation is significantly larger than the second-generation English ministry, a dynamic that is not uncommon in many Korean immigrant churches across the country. At the time of this study, New Hope is undergoing a large new construction of a sanctuary. They have been in the planning and development stages for several years. Completion of the building is scheduled for December 2020.

Interestingly, all three churches in this study use different mediums to broadcast their weekly worship services during this time of COVID-19. Portland Baptist primarily uses their website and YouTube, while Faith uses Zoom. New Hope Presbyterian Church broadcasts their service via Facebook Live and then uploads the video on YouTube. For the particular service that I attend, I notice that all the praise team is made up of all Korean Americans and that the presider and speaker for that Sunday is also Korean American.

4.3.1 Paula – “Veggie Tales” in the Back Room.

Paula is single and in her mid 20s and recently graduated from Portland State University. Her dad was the first in her family to immigrate to New York after completing his mandatory military service in South Korea. Her mom immigrated to Los Angeles before the riots in 1992. Her apartment was burned down as a result of the riots

and that incident is something that her mom does not bring up often. Paula also shares that both of her parents entered the country without proper documentation and so for them, it was a matter of survival to provide for their family.

“For them, there was that fear of like trying to survive. That’s what motivated them to do whatever they needed to make things work. But yeah, they don’t like to talk about their past too much, but that’s kind of what I’ve gathered from what they have told us.”

Paula and her two siblings were all born on the East Coast and moved around quite a bit due to her family’s businesses. She mentions that there was ethnic and racial diversity in her friend group growing up; however, when they moved to Newport, Oregon, a small town on the coast, she and another Chinese girl were the only Asians at school.

Paula’s home life growing up was almost the opposite. Her parents regularly taught her that she was Korean first and then American. She shares that they often enforced speaking Korean at home and that she learned a lot of her Korean from watching Korean dramas and listening to Korean pop music. Paula looks back and says that this part of her identity was something that she longed for perhaps unknowingly at the time. She mentions how difficult it was trying to explain differences in culture to her white friends. For example, she had to explain why she was never allowed to sleep over at her friend’s house, something that many first-generation Korean immigrants do not let their children do, but that after a while her friends stopped inviting her. She shares that at school, the white students were her friends, but that outside of school, they were not. A part of her and her family’s life in Newport was going to a small, Korean church;

however, Paula shares that there were no other kids except her and her brother and that all they did was watch was “Veggie Tales” in the back room.

For the last two years of high school, Paula and her family moved to Beaverton, a large suburb of Portland, and that is when she began attending New Hope. She says having a group of Korean friends her age was something for which she had yearned for a long time. As she graduated and moved onto college, Paula talks about going to Portland State University and continuing on a journey of learning more about her Korean roots.

“In my second, third, fourth year, I had this deep yearning of kind of trying to get in contact or learning more about my roots, I guess. So, I got heavily involved with the Korean Students’ Association on campus. I decided to study abroad as well. I think that’s when I realized I’m a lot more American than I thought I was just because, yeah, like going to Korea, I went in pretty cocky thinking, “like my Korean’s ok,” but the culture shock was insane. They could tell right away that you’re from America, and they’ll treat you differently.”

She talks about not expecting such differences between being Korean American and being Korean; everything from mannerisms to personal fashion and style was so different for her. Paula brings up an interesting observation at this point in the interview. She mentions that how her parents raised her was influenced greatly by what Korea was like right before her parents immigrated to the United States. However, she points out that the Korea of today is wildly different than the Korea her parents left in the 1980s.¹⁵

Paula brings up this observation to say that she is learning how to navigate being a Korean American adult. She talks about growing up and wanting to be a respectful daughter and obeying everything her parents said; however, now as an adult, she realizes

¹⁵ Find a reference about Koreans immigrating at a certain time being stuck in that mindset

that it is increasingly more and more difficult for her to share her thoughts and opinions with her parents because of how different and divergent those ideas can be.

“As I get older, it’s harder for me to kind of just sit there and accept everything they say is the truth. Um, you know when you’re younger and you’re so dependent on your parents and everything comes from your parents and that’s all you know. As I’ve learned and grown as a person, I start to see their own bias and how that has impacted me and how that’s shaped my bias.”

She brings up the issue of race and the current climate in our country and mentions that because of her parents’ lived experiences as victims of violence and racial unrest in Los Angeles, she cannot have conversations about supporting the African American community today.

“It’s interesting because I think we’ve gotten closer, like especially me and my mom, because now that we’re older there are things that they can tell us that they couldn’t when we were younger, but then, on the other aspect, there are things that I want to tell them, but maybe it’s like language barrier, but I think it’s more just like cultural, I don’t think that I could ever fully explain it to them or have them fully understand because of their lived experience as well.”

She does add that she feels that her parents’ generation failed in many ways by being silent in the face of racial discrimination and seeing racism, even as Korean Americans, as simply a black and white issue.

“For example, right now with all the protests going on, there’s so much that I want to say, and I can say, but then, my mom having been in the middle of the LA riots, her apartment got burned down. I can’t sit there and tell her like, ‘well, sorry.’ I feel like it’s hard because I want to understand them, and I appreciate their experience, and I know that it was a definitely struggle for them to go through, but then also, I want them to realize that low key, their generation also failed us too because you know, this (racism and discrimination) has been going on for so many years.”

When it comes to church, Paula states that it is already hard enough to figure out what it means to be Korean American, but that adding faith is yet another layer to consider. She points out that Korea is not a Christian nation and uses her family's story as an example. Even though they attended church, Paula says that her family did not really pray at home and that they still observed and participated in ancestral worship.¹⁶ She mentions her grandparents as not being believers. Another wrinkle for Paula's family was that even though they attended church, her parents often saw faithful church members and deacons taking advantage of others financially. She does share her belief that for her generation and those to come that church should have a place in helping Korean Americans have a healthy racial and ethnic identity, but she is not sure what that would look like. A last comment that Paula adds:

“Trying to connect the younger generations with the older generations should be a goal. I don't know. I've always felt awkward going into the main building. I guess it's because it's very adult, very Korean. I would also say, I think just like the cross (cultural) teaching would help too. We have a very unique mindset as Korean Americans growing up, *as* Americans, versus my parents, the parents that came here and just had to grow up *with* Americans. Maybe just like cultural exchange or activities to do at home or topics to talk about together.”

4.3.2 Sharon – Calling Insurance Companies

Sharon is single and in her mid 20s. Sharon's dad was the first to immigrate from her immediate family in the late 1980s. His mother and sister were already in America, and he was in search of new opportunities. Their family did not have much and so they

¹⁶ Ancestral worship

worked any and every job they could to make ends meet. Sharon's mom and dad met at church and were eventually married in California before they moved up to Oregon.

When talking about her experiences growing up and not having to explain herself, Sharon says:

“Growing up for me, I did have my friends from school, and they were majority white, but I was more closer to my church friends which were Korean, Korean Americans like me or grew up similar to me. And so, community-wise, I was friends with everybody all around. At school, I didn't really have a choice because I was the only Asian kid. And then, weekends and what not, it was predominantly (with) my church friends. And then, I'd say I gravitate more towards hanging out with my church friends because there a sense of comfort.”

Sharon mentions that in college she explored different friend groups but that she found herself gravitating back to Asian Americans.

“My freshman and sophomore year I wasn't really connected to the church and the Korean community because my parents were kind of strict growing up. College was kind of like my freedom, exploring different friend groups, just seeing what's out there. And then eventually, I gravitated back towards an Asian American community because of how we were raised. We have similar experiences. Like my white friends, they don't have that immigrant parent and what not or growing up having to translate for your parents, calling insurance companies or living with parents that are not familiar with the area or country. Being able to relate on similar stories and experiences is what kind of brought us closer.”

Like many other immigrants, Sharon's parents went to church; however, she mentions that her parents were very devout and that since the beginning, she and her sister always saw church as their playground, because they were there all the time. When asked about what the Korean American church means for her, she talks about the opportunities that she had to serve and volunteer growing up and how she learned about God and about faith through vacation Bible schools and weekly Sunday School. She adds

that being connected to the Korean community is something that she sees as a strength of growing up at New Hope. She mentions the power of being able to connect relationally with others who come from similar backgrounds and shared experiences. Sharon realizes how second-generation Korean Americans are able to bring multiple identities to the table and be more open-minded than their parents or grandparents. She uses the word, “bridge,” as something that many second-generation Korean Americans could be with their parents, grandparents, and others.

On the other hand, she points out that Korean culture can also be a stumbling block at church if it is elevated higher and given more importance than it should be. Sharon talks about two examples in particular as a weakness of Korean churches. The first she mentions is the “stigma” that follows people if they do not act a certain way or believe certain things. She references generational differences in points of view and opinions and shares that there often is not much discussion about what is acceptable and what is not. The second thing she brings up is conversation topics that are taboo. She talks about how especially recently there are many issues like advocating for social justice and talking about rights for those in the LGBTQ community that are often not talked about in the Korean church and left unaddressed. It is almost as if the Korean church avoids these discussions altogether in her opinion.

As we continue the interview, perhaps it is due to the questions themselves, but I notice that Sharon is mindful to talk about both the strengths and weaknesses of being Korean American and her experiences at New Hope. Up until this point, she has talked about how shared experiences have helped her connect with her friends and other Korean Americans; however, she brings up her parents and their friends at church and how close

they are to each other. She touches upon the fact that though their stories are different, being immigrants together has “knit them together” into a close community. On the other hand, when talking about her parents and other first-generation Korean immigrants, Sharon talks about how stubborn they can be and how difficult it is to convince them or change their minds about things.

The last topic in the conversation centers around Sharon’s experiences during college and with campus ministries. She was actively involved in Campus Crusade for Christ, or CRU for short, in the first several years of college; however, she says that even though everyone was friendly and welcoming, she never felt really comfortable and at home. She mentions sermons during large group meetings or the way that people from the “majority culture” as she calls them interacted with each other causing discomfort to her and her other Asian friends.

Sharon brings up other “shared” experiences again, but this time that phrasing is used to talk about the references or stories that this particular group shared that she did not know what they were talking about or that she could not understand. She expresses a certain amount of frustration at not being able to relate to other people’s stories and testimonies. She says that if someone was not raised in a certain culture whether that is ethnic culture or perhaps the culture of a certain region, it is hard to fully understand the habits and traditions of the group. After a little while, Sharon says that she stopped going to CRU and joined the Asian American campus ministry partner called EPIC. She says that she felt much more at home there with being able to connect with experiences and stories. That idea of connection that she has brought up throughout our time has been one of the major reasons that she has come back to New Hope after graduating from college.

4.3.3 John – Echolocation and Finding God

John is single and in his mid 20s. His grandmother was the first to immigrate to the United States about forty years ago. He says that she was a single mom who came with twenty dollars in her pocket. John's dad and aunt were the next to come over to the San Jose, California area. His parents were married and eventually settled in Oregon after moving to Kent, Washington for a brief time.

John grew up in Beaverton, Oregon and went to school with a majority of white students. He says that there were a couple of Asian students "sprinkled in" his elementary school with more in his middle school, but when it came to high school, there were not many other Asians. He says it is because his high school was an older one with lots of history and tradition. To Asian parents, that meant it was old, outdated, and not a good school.

Like the other interviewees in this study, John and his family attended church for the social aspect of connecting with other Koreans. He begins talking about his faith, mentioning that his parents are not believers and that they saw church as an outlet for them to meet other immigrants. Like Paula's congregation, the church that John attended in elementary school did not have many young people or programs for him and his sister, but he does mention that vacation Bible school was where he learned the "basics" about God and about faith.

John's honesty about his faith is refreshing in the sense that he is not afraid to share that despite growing up going to church, he really did not know what faith in God meant back then. I am not sure if he attributes that to his parents not being Christians, but it does seem as though there is some connection between the two in his mind. John also

brings up his observation that Korean culture is heavily performance-driven with an emphasis on being smart and having knowledge. He shares that even though he did not know things like what the trinity was or the Holy Spirit, he did not ask out of fear or shame. In that sense, he talks about his formative years as a kind of running toward the direction of God blindfolded.

“It was like echolocation,” John says with a smile.

For middle school, John went to another church which he calls the “Korean culture church.” There were many international students and recent immigrants in that church, and he says that this is where he learned “Korean street lingo.” However, in one of the more eye-opening moments of these interviews, John shares that for some reason, the Lord felt far at this church. Out of all the aspects of God, he shares that at this church he understood God to be someone to respect and worship, but not necessarily someone who was close to him. He shares that at that time God was like a statue of Buddha on a shelf; someone to pray to but not someone with whom he could be in relationship.

John began attending New Hope in high school, and he says that at that point, he started to ask the question of why he was attending. Was it cultural? Was it something to meet people? That coupled with his friends getting baptized and taking faith more seriously helped him to begin to make his faith his own. He says that going away to college was a continuation of that journey and was the place where he took ownership of his faith, and he began to see faith as a two-way street and a relationship with God.

When describing the connection between faith and ethnic identity, John uses the word, “bicultural,” several times. He talks about the “beauty” of being bicultural and the different lenses that can be used to portray a richer understanding of God. He talks about

the idea of a father and that for many people, their dads are like friends that they could stand side by side with them. However, he points out that for him, that was not the father figure he had. To John, his dad was someone above him and someone to respect, not a buddy.

He says to the idea of God as this kind of distant father figure, “How dare I raise my voice or show my emotions?”

He adds that for him growing up, God was in the mold of a provider, someone to respect, and an authority figure. He sees the connection between this idea of God and how fathers are often seen in Korean culture. John traces the roots back to Confucianism and the cultural elements that have been blended with Christianity in Korean American churches.

As he continues to share, he stresses how precious it is to be able to see God in different ways. He does not disparage the idea of God as someone to respect, but that as he grew in his understanding and perhaps drawing upon his American identity, he was able to add another layer, so to speak, and have a different perspective of who God was, more like a friend. He brings up the topic of prayer as an example. He says that he could never imagine praying angry to God in Korean, but that in English he would at least entertain the idea and be more comfortable.

In college, John was active in various student organizations. He was a resident advisor, a leader in the Korean Students Association, and he also helped launch EPIC, the Asian American ministry that Sharon talked about during her interview. He shares that like Sharon, being a part of a campus ministry and being around people who shared similar experiences as immigrants really helped him feel understood and seen. He talks

about not having to explain what he was eating or feeling ashamed for having to call the bank for his parents when he was eight years old.

John went away for college and returned to New Hope after; however, he is quick to point out that the person who went away for college was not the same person who returned. He mentions growing in his faith and wanting to take some time to find the right fit when looking for a church. He points out that he returned to New Hope because of his experiences as a Korean American and how much he sees the value in being bicultural.

“As a second generation, because of being bicultural but being also bilingual, being able to cross cultures, I think you hold great benefits, being able to take things and see the world and see Scriptures in different ways. Culture itself is a different language, and you experience the Lord in a different way. That’s a benefit.”

He shares that he is thankful that God made him Korean American, and that unique identity is something to not be ashamed of but one that should be seen as an advantage. When I ask for a little bit more on that topic, John shares his hope that New Hope could be a church that is proud of their Korean American identity. For example, he says with all of this racial unrest that people are uncomfortable talking about race and ethnicity, and he says that is exactly why church needs to be that “brave and safe space.”

John’s interview struck a balance between being overly optimistic about being Korean American and the challenges on the ground and in the actual relationships between generations.

“As for the challenges of being Korean American, I think you will have to walk against the current. You will have to walk against, and I guess cause friction at times because of the differences between first and second-generation cultures.”

At the end of the time together, he shares that he appreciates how both generations can bring the different ways they see God to create a more nuanced understanding. He says where first generation Koreans see God perhaps more linearly, second-generation Korean Americans can be more flexible and abstract. The downside to that, John points out, is that even though they are worshipping the same Lord, sometimes it does not feel like that.

4.3.4 New Hope Focus Group

The focus group for New Hope Presbyterian is conducted over Zoom, and as we begin meeting, the conversation turns to the topic of parents and first-generation Korean immigrants. In light of the current events around the death of George Floyd and the protests going on across the country, but especially in Portland, Paula, Sharon, and John all have been talking about what is going on with their parents. For all three of them, they are currently living at home, and social distancing has given them an opportunity to have more conversation about what is happening in the United States. They all share that they have been trying to engage more in talking with their parents about issues of race and their place in this country as Korean Americans; however, they admit that for their parents and their parents' generation, being silent seems to be the preferred response to what is happening.

Sharon mentions:

“It’s interesting because protests are something our parents’ generation grew up with in Korea. However, when it comes to here in America, that fact seems to be forgotten. They ask me why I care about these issues and point out that I’m not black.”

Furthermore, they add that their parents share concerns about safety and fear of what would happen as a result of intervening or getting too involved in speaking out against discrimination or injustice. Perhaps, some of the sentiment from the parents of the interviewees comes from South Korea’s recent history of what many believe to have been an overreaching government and a country of young people that has often taken to the streets to protest its abuses of power.

The conversation shifts to talking about New Hope and Korean American churches in general. They share their past experiences with divisions in the church and talk about how communication has been difficult not only due to language differences, but also because of a lack of effort on both sides. At times, they add it seems that both generations have just resigned to be by themselves without much connection with the other. John points out his hope that the church could overcome emphasizing being Korean or being American and remember that “the purpose of it all is Christ.”

Paula, Sharon, and John express their hopes that though the English ministry, or EM for short, is small at New Hope, they could grow to build a stronger relationship with the entire church. They point out that it is not just with the first-generation Koreans that they feel distant, but they also mention that they feel disconnected with the second and third-generation young people in middle and high school as well.

John adds,

“I hope that one day there isn’t that division where we say, ‘Oh, you’re from the Korean congregation’ or ‘I’m from the English congregation,’ but that we could be one church and together in mindset and purpose.”

Interestingly, though these three interviewees share so much more in common with the youth group students who tend to be more American than Korea, there is still a barrier to connection at New Hope. When asked about why that is and what could change that, they mention two things. First, they say, is the lack of space or opportunity to get to know one another. At New Hope, the youth group from grades 6-12 worship by themselves on Sundays. Secondly, they talk about changing the mindset from a judgmental one to one that shows more grace towards each other. They specifically point out the statistic that many young people are not returning to the church after graduating high school and going to college, perhaps even more so in a Korean context.

They are fully aware that they are the exception and not the norm. They then talk about how Korean elders in the church often judge second and third-generation Korean Americans unfairly according to things like attire and outward appearance. Sharon mentions that this has led to some of her friends and acquaintances leaving the Korean church all together with hurts and scars that are often never resolved. They end the time by sharing their hopes that New Hope could be a place where the culture moves from being close-minded to one of grace and understanding.

5. Conclusion

I begin my conclusion with a confession. When my advisor mentioned that the end of this thesis would be the hardest part to complete, I did not fully appreciate what he meant at that time. The process of writing this conclusion has indeed been challenging for many different reasons. Thankfully, numerous faculty and mentors along the way have mentioned that completing this thesis is not my magnum opus or the sum of my life's work in ministry. That small reminder has helped relieve the pressure that I have been feeling as I am reaching the end of this process. However, if I am being honest, there is another reason why I have been feeling such a burden. It comes from wanting to get "this" right, but what is "this?"

On one hand, "this" is the immigrant Korean church, the church that I have tried to portray in some detail with all its strengths and weaknesses—the church that has such a powerful history and influence, but one that has an equally uncertain future. On the other hand, if I dig a little deeper, I must admit that the "this" to which I refer is finding my own peace in my relationship with the Korean church, something for which my collaborators were also searching. If I could go back and add a question to the interviews and focus groups, it would be about the reasons for which each individual chose to participate in this study. I think the answer would be something along the lines of feeling a sense of connectedness and a desire to process their complicated relationship with the immigrant Korean church.

There is a phrase in Korean that applies to our connection with the Korean church, and it is loosely translated, “to harm and heal at the same time.”¹ That succinctly captures what collectively I, along with the collaborators in this study, seem to feel about the immigrant Korean church. There have been stories of a powerful sense of identity and belonging. On the other hand, there have been tales of terrible miscommunications and misunderstandings that have made people give serious thought to walking away from the Korean church and even to abandoning their own faith journeys.

A little over twenty years ago, I remember having a conversation with some of my close friends. We had all grown up in Korean churches, and at Rutgers, where I did my undergraduate studies, there was a large Korean campus ministry that was thriving at the time. Many of us were small group leaders and heavily involved with it. The question was about the future and what the Korean church would look like in ten or twenty years. Two things stand out about that memory. The first is that even at that time in the late 90s, the issues that have been brought up in this thesis regarding multigenerational ministry, balancing faith and ethnicity, and our relationship with white churches were of concern. The second is that we wondered out loud together if there even would be a need for an immigrant Korean church in ten years’ or twenty years’ time. We thought that with a growing group of Korean Americans who spoke English that we would eventually just become a part of a predominantly white church or a multiethnic one.

That memory was from a long time ago; however, since that time, my experience in ministry in Korean churches as well as opportunities to partner with other non-Korean

¹ “병 주고 약 준다”

churches has brought to light several relevant points. The first is that as a Korean American pastor in predominantly white spaces, there have been too many instances when I either had to ignore and downplay my Korean identity or I was asked to speak for all Koreans and Korean Americans or worse yet, to speak for all Asians. Over the years, there has been an implicit pressure to be colorblind and talk about “Christian or gospel identity” and not about being Korean. I have had to remind myself how important it is to recognize all the parts of my identity and to speak up about being a Korean American Christian. Recently, I have found myself stressing the importance of Korean American representation within our own community as well as in the community at large.

Sarah Shin, the associate national director of evangelism for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship writes,

“We don’t live in a world that is in need of colorblind diversity because diversity that rests on colorblindness seems to lead to chaos. We need something beyond colorblindness, something that both values beauty in our cultures and also addresses real problems that still exist in our society decades after the civil rights movement.”²

Shin’s comments are particularly salient given the need for voices and leadership to help provide meaning and direction for people seeking to understand what it means to be Korean American living in the United States today. Shin continues to also add, “Instead of being colorblind, we need to become *ethnicity aware* in order to address the beauty and brokenness in our ethnic stories and the stories of others.”³

For a long time, the understanding in many immigrant Korean churches seems to have been that identity in Christ was to subsume Korean identity to the point that ethnic

² Sarah Shin, *Beyond Colorblind* (InterVarsity Press, 2017), 5, <https://beyondcolorblind.com/>.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

identity would no longer be necessary or important. In fact, when the topic of Korean culture comes up, church leaders will often redirect those conversations to talk about unity in the body of Christ. Religion professor, Kale Yu adds that, “The inclusion of culture in the church, they argue, is particularly dangerous given the way in which culture is understood as a subjective human-made construction and therefore, at its basic level, an un-Christian enterprise.”⁴ However, the stories of the collaborators in this study seem to point to a need to recognize and celebrate Korean identity as well.

All of which brings me to my second point, which is that today, it seems as though immigrant Korean churches must find a way to be more Korean, not less. They must be able to address the questions and concerns of their congregants regarding race and ethnicity. One thing that came up on several occasions through collaborator interviews was their suggestion that Korean churches should provide safe spaces for discussions on the ways Korean Americans can thrive in multiple settings and cultures not by blending identities together into an amorphous one, but by lifting up each element of their culture and heritage so that all these can be a vibrant part of who they are.

All this comes with a caveat, that the immigrant Korean church must find a way to help its congregants integrate all parts of their faith and ethnic identity in a healthy way. It is no small understatement that how the Korean church does in helping those navigate their identity has serious implications for its congregants, most of all for its youth and children. For those who are committed to seeing the immigrant Korean church grow as a multigenerational community, this quite possibly could be the last meaningful

⁴ Yu, “Christian Model Minority,” 17.

chance to grow a thriving and connected body for everyone including first, second, and even third-generation Korean Americans.

There are several areas that the immigrant Korean church could target for renewal that I believe would yield a healthier community and church. The first practice is in the area of mental health awareness, specifically among adolescents. Along with many Asian communities, the Korean American community struggles to discuss mental health and often does not have the vocabulary or the framework to talk about psychological well-being in ways that are commonly acceptable in Western culture in the family as well as at church. The statistics paint a bleak picture. Korean American adolescents experience depression at higher rates than American adolescents, while also experiencing more intergenerational conflict than other Asian American groups.⁵

As has been touched upon in the literature section, it is no secret that the cause for many Korean Americans is the significant amount of acculturative stress that comes from being in between multiple worlds. Furthermore, “intergenerational conflict can result in a host of mental health problems, or the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems that prevent children from behaving in a socially acceptable way.”⁶ Church has often filled this void and provided a positive and “protective” space for many youths in regards to their mental well-being; however, it is also clear that “negative religious coping and

⁵ Eunjung Kim et al., “Integrating Faith-Based and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches to Adapt the Korean Parent Training Program,” *Special Issue: Social Determinants of Health* 37 (November 1, 2017): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2017.05.004>.

⁶ Ibid.

congregational problems” had the opposite effect: further exacerbating mental health concerns, namely depression.⁷

“Negative religious coping and congregational problems” are broad terms that perhaps make it difficult to identify exactly what that entails; however, these findings are concerning to say the least. What I am trying to communicate is that the stakes for immigrant Korean churches are high. There is much to gain, but also potentially much to lose.

Some of what the collaborators in this study expressed seems to reflect their own experience with acculturative stress and living in between two cultures. Would it be a stretch to say that their faith communities had significant impact on who they are today? I wonder how their stories might have been different if their churches had begun to have these kinds of conversations earlier.

One way that the immigrant Korean church can address some of these concerns is in the area of parent training. As an example, there is an ongoing initiative through the University of Washington that studied six churches. In those locations, they piloted the Korean Parent Training Program “in order to promote positive parenting practices and decrease mental health disparities of Korean American children.”⁸ The program covers topics like parental stress management, understanding child development, teaching effective discipline techniques and dealing with shame.

⁷ Sangwon Kim and Choong Yuk Kim, “Korean American Adolescents’ Depression and Religiousness/Spirituality: Are There Gender Differences?,” *Current Psychology* 36, no. 4 (December 2017): 824.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

However, the most helpful aspect in this program is helping parents understand the differing and often competing cultural contexts in which their children are being raised. This is something that not many first-generation Korean parents understand fully. For example, in Korean culture, respect for elders and those in authority is absolute and not to be questioned. On the other hand, for children in schools, they are taught to be inquisitive, curious, and often to challenge norms. At home, this kind of behavior is punished, while at school it is rewarded. One could see how confusing and inconsistent the messaging would be for any Korean American child navigating such divergent contexts.

Initiatives like the Korean Parent Training Program help educate parents and elders to better support their children. This is just one example of the kinds of interventions that churches can provide or facilitate in partnership with other organizations to support their congregations and communities. Mental health awareness and resources would be particularly effective because they have benefits not only for children, but also for parents, grandparents, and the larger community. It may sound overly simplistic, but what Korean American churches need are opportunities to build trust and relationship between the different generations.

Another area in the immigrant Korean church that could be a potential target for renewal is the area of leadership training. Opportunities for both first and second-generation leaders to examine and work together through what kind of leadership would create a healthy and thriving Korean American church community would go a long way in addressing some of the gaps that have been raised in this thesis. One of the major obstacles to meaningful progress between leaders of both generations has been the

different models of leadership and power that have existed within the community.

Traditional Korean culture is strongly patriarchal, and its organizations and their leadership structures are often based on hierarchy. This has had profound impact on the church in Korea, but also for the immigrant Korean church in America.

In the Korean church, the whole structure of leadership is often based on a male senior pastor. The same is true for immigrant churches in the United States. For the most part across denominations, senior pastors in the Korean church are seen as the head of the church, and their word and decisions are not to be questioned. Though this type of authoritarian leadership may provide some benefits, recent trends within churches both in Korea and in America have caused churches to rethink their understanding of effective Christian leadership. Publicized accounts of the moral failings of church leaders in both Korea and America are only some of the evidence of a system of church leadership that needs change.

Other evidence of this can be seen in the estranged relationship between the generations of Korean Americans within the church. “Pastor-centric hierarchical leadership”⁹ has negatively impacted congregations and communities. Those Korean Americans who have seen examples of shared leadership styles in other contexts are reluctant to endure hierarchical systems that always favor the first generation and follow the senior pastor unquestioningly. An inability to compromise and work together is one of the main reasons why the immigrant Korean church has experienced much strife and

⁹ Ephesiologist, “The Dark Side of Hierarchical Leadership,” Ephesiology, November 29, 2020, <https://ephesiology.com/blog-post/the-dark-side-of-hierarchical-leadership/>.

division. The second generation is no longer willing to stay together when their voices and opinions are not valued and respected.

Some of the examples and effects of these phenomena have been mentioned in this study. However, research literature about the immigrant Korean church and about these leadership struggles are well-documented. I hope this project can serve the greater community in envisioning a new way forward in the area of conducting meaningful conversations about how a more shared and collaborative leadership structure may benefit the immigrant Korean church. It is my belief that various generations of Korean Americans deeply do desire a future together. I hope that in the writing of this thesis that I have not erred on the side of pessimism and bitterness. Though I have seen and heard the full gamut of experiences within the Korean church, I still am profoundly hopeful for the future for all generations.

I truly believe that most everyone in the Korean church wants the best for the body of Christ and the community at large. There is a genuine desire to live in harmony with one another and to grow in unity and purpose. As far as I can see, the challenges that have faced the immigrant Korean church have not been a result of a lack of care or effort on the part of any involved. What has been missing are creative spaces for the leaders of both generations to listen to each other and to learn the tools and skills necessary to move forward together. In order to do this, the sacrifice and commitment from both generations of leaders is an absolute necessity, not a suggestion.

Another way I could frame it is that both groups of leaders need each other in order to heal and move forward. Both groups of leaders can take the initiative and actively earn the respect of other leaders. First generation pastors can lead by example

and take responsibility for their part in the missteps of the past. This is not to say that the second generation is free of any wrongdoing or need for accountability; however, this would go a long way in setting a tone of cooperation and trust for the future. Where second generation leaders can take the initiative in the trust-building process would be to plan for a future together.

An example of what this could potentially look like comes from New Hope Presbyterian Church. Over the past year, the leadership of both Korean-speaking and English-speaking congregations realized that they were actually one church in name only. Leaders and staff began to understand that from structures and systems to planning and service, they operated as separate entities almost all of the time. The question that was asked over and over was: “How can the church be more intentional in being one body of Christ despite the differences in language and culture?”

This is still very much a work in progress; however, there are some things that New Hope has started to do that provide some reasons for hope. The first is the use of names and titles. There are instances, where identifying the Korean congregation or the English congregation is necessary; however, as much as possible, New Hope has tried to limit calling themselves the “KM” or “Korean ministry” or the “EM,” “English ministry.” It is a mindset that the church is trying to have that they are indeed one congregation and one community. Secondly, New Hope has begun to share the same digital content on both channels across all social media platforms. There are some language barriers that do exist; however, one of the things that became clear is that especially for younger congregants, they were not just a part of the Korean congregation or the English

congregation. There was a fluidity there that the church identified and wanted to affirm and provide freedom for people to choose where to be most involved.

Lastly, New Hope began to look for ways that both groups within the church could work together and partner not only to serve the local community but also to serve one another. For example, at New Hope, there are many young couples and working professionals who have moved to the area for work or for school. Especially during COVID-19 with travel being limited, many of these people have not been able to go home and visit family and friends. In addition, for many of the elderly members of the church, they have been isolated and unable to gather together due to social distancing restrictions.

This is where the church saw an opportunity for these groups to serve each other. New Hope paired up younger, second generation congregants with older, first generation ones and gave them opportunities to get to know each other and build relationship over the last year. From this small step, there have been new friendships formed and a growing respect towards each other. The church has seen Korean Americans members helping elderly Korean congregants with things like translation, picking up groceries, and weekly visitations, while Korean congregants have been able to share with the younger generation of Korean Americans more about Korean culture. What was clearly noticeable was a desire from second generation Korean Americans to connect more with Korean congregation members and to learn from them as well. One really creative moment took place during the fall, when some of the elderly members took some time to teach the younger generation how to prepare traditional Korean dishes like kimchi.

There is still a long way to go. At the time of writing this conclusion, several colleagues in ministry from Korean churches in other parts of the county were reaching out to me to discuss these very issues. More specifically, these ministry leaders were wondering how to navigate these challenges and differences between generations. They voiced their frustrations about what to do when first generation Korean church leaders are reluctant to collaborate with second-generation leaders in English-speaking ministry contexts. I offered my support and encouragement but asked them to think if moving forward together as a multigenerational, Korean and English-speaking church is indeed what they wanted to do. I shared my personal belief that I did not believe New Hope Presbyterian Church, with its efforts aimed at growing together as one congregation, is the only healthy model of what the immigrant church should be.

I went on to share that plenty of churches find meaning and purpose as only first-generation Korean community. In addition, there are plenty of options for those second and third generation Korean Americans who have moved onto other churches without a first-generation Korean congregation. However, for those that intentionally want to undertake this journey, I hope that this thesis can be a resource to facilitate these conversations and help all generations of church leaders.

Throughout the process of conducting interviews and writing this thesis, I began to notice my mind wandering and thinking of additional questions and topics related to the immigrant Korean church that I did not get a chance to cover in this study. The choice of using ethnography as my methodology was an intentional one that offered many benefits and strengths and fit what I was looking for from my research interest; however, it did limit the scope of the project as well. At the beginning of this process, I did my best

to conceive of a question and focus that could be studied and completed within a year's timeframe. That amount of time was the main reason that I concentrated my focus to churches in the Portland, Oregon area. I did not think that broadening this project to other cities and casting a wider net of churches would be feasible with my timeframe.

However, I do think a possibility for future research might be to conduct a study like this one with more churches in other regions to perhaps connect the dots and see what similarities and discrepancies may arise.

One group of potential collaborators that I did not get a chance to interview and talk with as I originally planned are those who have grown up in a Korean church but now find themselves not attending church at all. Over the course of my life, I have had many friends and acquaintances who fall into this category. Some I grew up with at church. Some I met later on in my life; however, the perspective that this group of Korean Americans could potentially bring to this conversation about faith and ethnicity would be a valuable and needed lens.

In addition, for the better part of the last twenty years, I have worked in youth ministry in various cities across the country. I have many former students who were active in youth group and attended church during their formative years, but now are no longer connected to any local congregation. I am still grateful that to this day many of these students and I still share a great relationship and will often keep in touch. I have asked them from time to time how they are doing in terms of their faith journeys but have never sat down with any of them for an interview. This thesis has given me a new direction perhaps to conduct further research with old students and those who may have

been a part of the immigrant Korean church before but now are not, to see what insights their stories may bring to this ongoing conversation.

All of these individuals who have left the immigrant Korean church have done so for a variety of reasons, and my suspicion is that many Korean churches are not even aware of the causes of tension and disagreement that these people hold. In many ways, it is like a blind spot that Korean churches to this day are still having a difficult time finding language for and creating spaces for healthy conversations about how to do ministry together between multiple generations despite years of trying to find solutions.

APPENDIX

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY (INTERVIEW)

Researcher's Name(s): Daniel Lee

Project Title: Ecclesial Identity Among 2nd Generation Korean Americans in Oregon

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to better understand the religious identity of 2nd generation Korean Americans.

Key Information

I hope to interview you for an hour about your experience as a Korean American within the church. With your permission, I hope to audio record our conversation. Conversations will be stored on a secure cloud-based storage site and will be deleted after they are transcribed. After the interview, you will also be given the choice to participate in a focus group with 3 or 4 other people.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you can end your participation at any time, or refuse to answer any question for any reason. To thank you for your time, I'd like to offer a \$20 Amazon e-gift card for participating in this interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain your confidentiality. I will use fake names and will change other identifiers (e.g., city and name of church) so that you will remain anonymous in my paper. Throughout the study, I will be the only one who has access to your information. However unlikely this may be, you will be notified as soon as possible about any there is a breach in confidentiality.

Information that you provide that is not linked to your identity may be used again for other research purposes.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

Subject

Date

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY (FOCUS GROUP)

Researcher's Name(s): Daniel Lee

Project Title: Ecclesial Identity Among 2nd Generation Korean Americans in Oregon

Key Information & INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to better understand the religious identity of 2nd generation Korean Americans.

Your participation will potentially benefit local churches in the area and Korean American community as the information provided may be used to make recommendations for mental well-being and healthy self-identity. I hope you will participate in an hour-long group discussion with 2 or 3 other Korean Americans about your experiences similar to what we covered in our interview. You will be encouraged to share anything from our previous conversation to the group. This is a friendly and open conversation.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you can end your participation at any time, or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Due to the nature of the focus group, while every effort will be made to respect privacy, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. All participants in the focus group, however, will be asked to respect the privacy of fellow participants and to not repeat what is said outside of the group. Information that you provide that is not linked to your identity may be used again for other research purposes.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems, and consent to participating in this study.

Subject

Date

**CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
(ZOOM INTERVIEW)**

Researcher's Name(s): Daniel Lee

Project Title: Ecclesial Identity Among 2nd Generation Korean Americans in Oregon

INTRODUCTION

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to better understand the religious identity of 2nd generation Korean Americans.

Key Information

I hope to interview you for an hour by video conference about your experience as a Korean American within the church. Although I will disable video recording features in Zoom, with your permission, I hope to audio record our conversation. Conversations will be stored on a secure cloud-based storage site and will be deleted after they are transcribed. After the interview, you will also be given the choice to participate in a focus group with 3 or 4 other people.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you can end your participation at any time, or refuse to answer any question for any reason. To thank you for your time, I'd like to offer a \$20 Amazon e-gift card for participating in this interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain your confidentiality. I will use fake names and will change other identifiers (e.g., city and name of church) so that you will remain anonymous in my paper. Throughout the study, I will be the only one who has access to your information. However unlikely this may be, you will be notified as soon as possible about any there is a breach in confidentiality.

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CONFIDENTIALITY

Due to the nature of the focus group, while every effort will be made to respect privacy, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. All participants in the focus group, however, will be asked to respect the privacy of fellow participants and to not repeat what is said outside of the group. Recording capabilities will be disabled in Zoom for Focus Groups meeting by video conference. Information that you provide that is not linked to your identity may be used again for other research purposes.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems, and consent to participating in this study.

Subject

Date

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Biography

Daniel J. Lee was born in Brooklyn, New York on October 13, 1977. His parents immigrated from South Korea and pursued careers in medicine and church ministry.

Daniel graduated from Rutgers University with a BA in English Literature in 1999. After working for several years in finance, elementary education, and youth ministry, he completed an MA in Educational Ministries from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2008. Daniel also received an MA in School Counseling from Harvard University in 2012. This thesis was written in partial fulfillment of his DMin from Duke Divinity School with a focus in leadership.

Daniel currently resides in Beaverton, Oregon and has been working in K-12 school administration and local church ministry for over fifteen years. He is presently on staff at a Korean American church and hopes to serve all generations of immigrants in helping them thrive as citizens of different cultures and communities. He enjoys sports and spending time with his family. He is married to Angie and has a daughter, Harper.