

1-1-2012

Intergenerational Church Splits

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Glory Church of Jesus Christ

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Recommended Citation

Hong, E., & Starcher, R. L. (2012). Intergenerational Church Splits. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 3(2), 218-235. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol3/iss2/6>

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Eunice Hong and Richard L. Starcher

abstract

Generational and cultural differences between the first- and second-generation Korean-American church leaders have caused division, anxiety, and tension. Though nearly all immigrant churches recognize the difficulties of embracing different generations and cultures, the lack of attention has resulted in frustration, bitterness, and ultimately, separation of the church. This article explores key factors contributing to church splits in multigenerational Korean-American churches in the greater Los Angeles area. Research participants included seventeen second-generation Korean-Americans. While they were from different churches and various denominations, all participants were involved in a church split.

Data was collected through open-ended, semi-structured interviews. A careful analysis of the data revealed that in leaving the first-generation Korean-American church, second-generation leaders pass through the following: 1) search for identity, 2) power struggle, 3) tension, and 4) separation. The article concludes with recommendations to help intergenerational churches bridge cultural and generational barriers.

After years of suppressing his anger and hurt, John couldn't hold back any longer. He stormed down the hall, burst into the senior pastor's office, and demanded a

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raise for all his years of service. The senior pastor, somewhat startled, looked up from his desk. After regaining his composure, he chuckled and replied in Korean, “You don’t do half the work the other pastors do around here. How would they feel if I gave only you a raise?”

Clenching his fists, John shouted back in English, “Don’t compare me to them! I’ve worked like a slave without any recognition! You have never given me the freedom to do anything!”

The smile faded from the senior pastor’s face as he sternly replied, “I’ve given you all the freedom you need. How dare you come in here and insult me by raising your voice!” Without a word, John stormed back out, slamming the door after him, never to return again.

This incident depicts a common scene among those serving in a multigenerational, Korean-American church. While John demanded a pay raise, it was not really the raise that John was after. Rather, he longed for appreciation and encouragement from his senior pastor. Years of hurt and anger have led many second-generation leaders to break with a larger, first-generation church, leaving first-generation leaders hurt and confused, despite their years of faithful and fruitful ministry.

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The remarkable growth of the Korean-American church is well documented.¹ However, division has accompanied this growth, with numerous splits into separate first- and second-generation congregations.² While God can and does transform church splits into church growth, these splits “are definitely painful experiences for all those involved.”³

This article reports the findings of a study on factors contributing to church splits in multigenerational Korean-American churches. Specifically, it gives voice to second-generation pastors who felt compelled to break away from their Korean-American churches. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with seventeen second-generation pastors from various denominations in the greater Los Angeles region. Data was analyzed using grounded theory procedures described by Kathy Charmaz.⁴

¹ J. W. Chang, “Overcoming Conflicts in the Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States: In Pursuit of Reconciliation and Renewal,” *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 59 (05), (1998): 231.

² Taehun Han, “A Strategy to Promote Reconciliation Between First- and Second-Generation Korean-American Pastors,” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009; J. H. Kim, “The Effects of Assimilation within the Korean-Immigrant Church: Intergenerational Conflicts Between the First and Second Generation Korean Christians in Two Chicago Suburban Churches,” *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 60 (04), (1999): 345; and Chang, 231.

³ S. K. Park, “An Analysis of English Ministries in the Korean Church in Southern California,” *Masters Abstracts International*, 35(04), (1997): 20.

⁴ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

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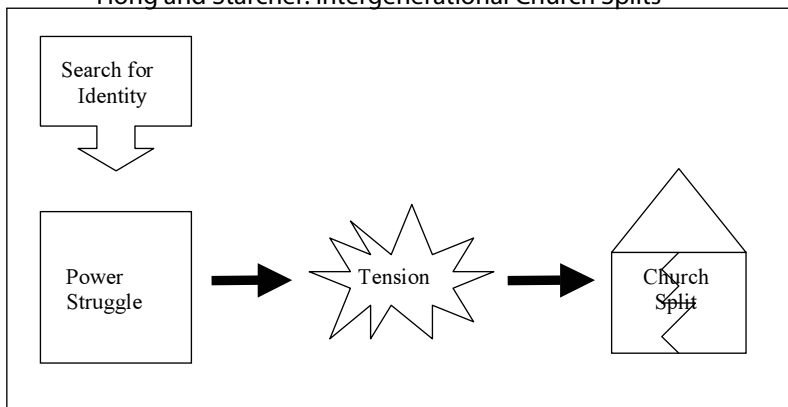


Figure 1

The anatomy of intergenerational church splits.

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Data analysis yielded the following grounded theory: *power struggle, fueled by the second-generation pastors' search for identity, produces tension that eventually results in a church split.* As second-generation pastors search for autonomy and identity, power struggles arise, creating tension that, left unresolved, eventually leads to a church split. (See figure 1.)

We discuss below identity, power struggle, tension, and church split, in an effort to demonstrate how the four are interrelated. The discussion begins with the search for identity that fuels the power struggle. We then explore the power struggle that leads to tension. Finally, we discuss the tension resulting from power struggle before concluding our analysis with an examination of church split itself.

the identity search

Children of immigrant families are known to struggle with identity because they are not fully one culture or the other. Second-generation pastors are no different in this regard. One study participant shared,

Our generation, we don't want buildings or material things passed down to us. We long for our own identity and that involves the first generation—their validation, their acknowledgment, their love and support, but we don't get much of that. I'm sure it's not because they don't want to give it, but I guess it's just a different form of it.

While second-generation pastors often struggle to accept certain dominant traditional Korean values, they nevertheless long to be affirmed and mentored by the first-generation leaders they respect and revere as spiritual fathers. However,

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their ambivalence toward certain Confucian values tends to obstruct healthy,
intergenerational relationships.

three thorny confucian values

Many second-generation pastors stumble over three interrelated Confucian values integral to traditional Korean culture: 1) performance, 2) shame, and 3) hierarchy.

Performance

Because the Korean culture values performance, pastors' level of involvement colors perceptions of their spirituality. It is interesting to note that the majority of study participants expressed frustration over having to attend various activities and services, especially early morning prayer meetings. One burned-out pastor said,

Before I left, I was always doing dual ministry. I was called as an EM [English Ministry] pastor, but somehow I was always doing KM [Korean Ministry] as well. I held several unofficial titles. I was preaching at the 5:30 AM service, I was the administrative pastor, I took care of the Sunday school ministry, took care of the EM, and I was doing house visitations with the KM members; all that good stuff.

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Participants felt weary of putting on a show. Though fatigued from trying to prove themselves in a performance-oriented culture, the second-generation pastors often kept on performing to avoid shaming themselves or their families.

Shame

Korea's shame culture goes hand-in-hand with its performance orientation. When an individual performs well, his or her family is honored and recognized. If not, shame falls upon the family. One participant shared,

The second generation leaves the first generation because of the shame culture. The people are not validated; they are too culturally different. Personal boundaries are crossed. Let's say there are four hundred college students, and half of them are in junior college. If one of them went to Ivy League, and the others went to junior college, the pastor will talk about the student that got into Harvard while the others are non-existent. Divorce, mental disease, etc. are very shameful to the culture that they have no place to stand. The church is not a healing place.

Pastor Andy hesitated for years to leave the church, despite the difficulties, because his departure would reflect poorly on his parents.

What will they say about my parents? That was the biggest [reason I did not leave], because I don't want my mom and dad to be shamed among the whole

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congregation. So I stuck it out because of them. I can't blame them, but that was the motivation for me to stay.

Hierarchy

Confucianism understands relationships in hierarchical terms. First generation Korean immigrants generally make top-down decisions that are passed from senior pastors and elders to second-generation pastors, which is a source of irritation for most second-generation pastors who want to be part of the decision-making process. Second-generation pastors prefer team ministry, but their egalitarianism conflicts with the hierarchical values of first-generation pastors. One participant said,

It is a cultural element; the Koreans are just somehow built to submit. They're very hierarchical, and there are strengths to that and weaknesses to that. The strengths are that you're able to do great things and accomplish great things by moving a mass of people. The biggest church in the world probably couldn't have happened anywhere else in the world, and if you know anything of that church structure, it's very dictatorship.

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One participant shared his frustration.

The entire Korean Ministry congregation was really breathing down my neck. I remember I said something to the senior pastor, "This isn't acceptable. You can't allow your elders to do these kinds of things." And I remember, he said, "Are you trying to teach me? Are you trying to teach me? You're so young; I'm your elder, why are you trying to teach me?" And that's all he heard in the whole conversation, and I remember my heart just broke and I realized, this guy is not fighting for us, he didn't hear anything that we were saying and the concerns that I have for the congregation.

Second-generation pastors also feel they are viewed as children regardless of their age and status in society. One participant, after seventeen years of serving as the second-generation EM pastor, shared,

The elders thought, "Here are a bunch of kids." But we were in our forties. I mean, come on. We're not little kids anymore. We were very successful in terms of vocation, community, and in all the things that we did.

the identity quest and mentoring

Coupled with the second generations' struggle with Eastern and Western cultures is the desire to establish individual identity, which, in turn, leads them to cry out for direction and mentoring from their senior pastor. In his experience as a pastor for the second generation, Pastor Caleb said,

The second-generation pastor expects a relationship and mentorship, but the first-generation pastor wants a workforce, and they do not meet and see eye to eye. The second generation operates by relational base that looks for a father figure to hold their hand and show them how the ministry is done, but the first-generation pastor does not have time for that, or the thought does not even enter into his mind because to him it's a job description that needs to be fulfilled. Because of poor mentorship, second-generation pastors leave ministry after a couple of years, cynical and bitter . . . All they want is to be taken care of, but in actuality, it's how many hours you have to work. If you ask a second-generation pastor, "How many hours do you spend with your senior pastor?" they will virtually say none; there is a gap between these expectations.

Finding no satisfactory role model at home or church, many second-generation pastors form their identity by reassembling fragmented pieces they understand about themselves. A pastor suggested about his generation,

We really are an identity-less generation. We don't know who we are. I may look Korean, but am I in my thoughts? No. Does that mean that I'm white? No. We really don't know who we are. We're neither this nor that.

Not being able to belong fully to one group or another generates frustration in seeking to establish an identity, which, in turn, fuels the second generations' desire for power and position in the church.

the power struggle

Fred Prinzing stated, "When in a conflict situation the question to ask is not, 'Who is right and who is wrong?' but 'Who is in charge?' In other words, the question to ask in a conflict situation is, 'Who has the power and authority?'"⁵ The struggle for power clearly emerged as the main factor contributing to second-generation pastors leaving the Korean-American immigrant church. As one participant shared,

The real struggle is feeling this need to try to create leverage, or trying to create political power or ministry power to be able to get what I want, but the reason why that tension exists is because there is one authority base where you try to contend for.

Another participant shared,

The issue of power dynamics . . . this is the reason why first and second ministry partnerships don't work out. Because at the end of the day, a

⁵ Fred Prinzing, *Handling Church Tensions Creatively: Adjusting Twelve Tensions to Avoid Conflict* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harvest, 1986), 86.

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first-generation pastor has to look at a second-generation pastor with equal regard, and that is a barrier that has not been broken yet.

While many factors contribute to power struggle, the data points to the following three main components: control, cultural disequilibrium, and ownership.

Control

Power struggle is closely aligned with control. As one pastor recalled, “It really comes down to control. Who wants control and who has control . . . in the end, one group will dominate the other.” It is interesting to note that fourteen of the seventeen study participants shared stories of clashing over control with the senior pastor and/or the elders before deciding to leave the first-generation church.

Cultural Disequilibrium

When asked what lay behind the power struggle between KM and EM leadership, participants pointed to cultural ambiguity. They suggested first-generation leaders feel threatened by second-generation pastors. These feelings may result from immigrants’ unfamiliarity with the new culture. For example, Pastor Billy, who was forced to resign from his fifteen-year post, shared this story,

I worked with the senior pastor for fifteen years. He retired, and a new senior pastor came in. He was, I think, one year older than me, and I knew that in terms of the transition, I wanted it to be smooth. So I went to him first, and I told him, “I’m going to be fully supportive of you. I’ll follow you, I’ll submit to you, no problem.” I wanted to just let him know just so that he would not think otherwise. And he kind of pulled an interesting trick on me, which I, to this day, am baffled by. He asked me a question about the Greek language. He asked me to define a word for him, to explain it to him, so I did. And we talked about it for about a deep twenty minutes, and then he said, “Oh, thank you.” And he just walked out. I didn’t think anything of that until I talked to Koreanized pastors later on, and found out that I got played, a back door, side played. Do you know what word he asked me to explain to him? He asked me to explain to him the Greek word for “authority.” And so I did, and then he asked me, “What does authority look like?” and I explained it to him, and I thought he was just asking me a propositional question. But all of my older Korean friends said, “No, he wasn’t asking you. He was telling you something in a kind of round about way.” So I thought, “Hmm, that sure is strange,” because I went to him and said, “You know, I’m going to submit to you, I’ll be totally fine.” . . . I think he was a bit fearful about how much influence I had, because at the time, the ministry was growing so large that it was becoming

Another study participant commented,

The biggest problem the KM will face is not if the second generation will do poorly; the issue is whether it will ever do well. Not only does that mean that there will be a fight for resources but also for space, and it's also an issue of pride. KM pastors want to grow, but they don't want the EM pastor to be a true leader and visionary because what that means, is that their leadership and vision might take them away from their vision and their leadership, and that's problematic, to have two leaders under one roof.

Participants suggested that having two powerful, influential leaders under one roof results in one leader growing more popular than the other.

When participants were asked if the same phenomenon of feeling threatened was true of Korean pastors in Korea, interviewees asserted that pastors in Korea were more secure and free to take risks. Participants also shared that, ironically, pastors in Korea tended to have a more global mindset than their immigrant counterparts. This difference can be understood in terms of cultural disequilibrium, from which pastors in Korea do not suffer because they are anchored in their home environment.

[First-generation pastors] are so alienated, and there is inferiority in terms of not being able to speak the language. Then here comes the young buck who speaks the language. So there is a language element and there is a sense of marginality, that they are not part of the mainstream culture so that the whole estimate enclave, there is not much social upward mobility for them. Whereas in Korea, there is no language barrier, I mean, there is a classism that divides them, but you don't have this lack of access and cultural differences. So I think that's always playing the back of their heads, that is, "I don't belong to the majority class." Then people who are inferior tend to be very, very controlling. That's how they deal with it. So you become a control freak even as a pastor. And "my way is the high way." So in that kind of setting there is no way you can negotiate anything. Dialogue is impossible. It's not even a language thing; it becomes a personality disorder.

Participants suggested that cultural ambiguity among first-generation, immigrant pastors is the result of KM pastors living as strangers in a foreign land. Living as marginalized individuals, first-generation pastors have controlled the church and have not ceded ownership rights to others, including second-generation pastors.

Many second-generation pastors leave because they do not feel the immigrant church is their church. Han states,

The lack of ownership is a significant reason for the weakness of the second-generation Korean American church. The authoritarian decision-making model greatly discourages the second-generation pastors. Most second-generation pastors do not feel that they can stay in the first-generation Korean church for a lifetime because they are not given ownership of the ministry; they are not invited into the decision making process of the church.⁶

Often, second-generation pastors are not granted the opportunity to rise to positions of leadership and influence because they are restricted in making decisions even with regard to their own ministries. While serving at a KM church, one young pastor asked himself, “When I turn 50, will that church be mine?” He answered, “No. Why? Because I didn’t see a future there. It’s not my church. It belongs to the KM.”

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When asked about the structure and layout of the Korean-American church, participants reported that until recently, the EM, regardless of the age group, was lumped together with the Education Department. A common Korean-American church organization chart may look something like the figure below.

Pastor Caleb agreed that the Korean-American church does not belong to the English speakers but to the Korean speakers.

When English speakers grow up, they don’t hold the same position as the deacon or elder; they are outside the decision-making body. They could be in their 30’s and 40’s, they can be professionals with lots of people working under them, but just because of the virtue of speaking English, they are lumped with the junior high students. That mentality hasn’t changed, and because of that,

⁶ Han, 39.

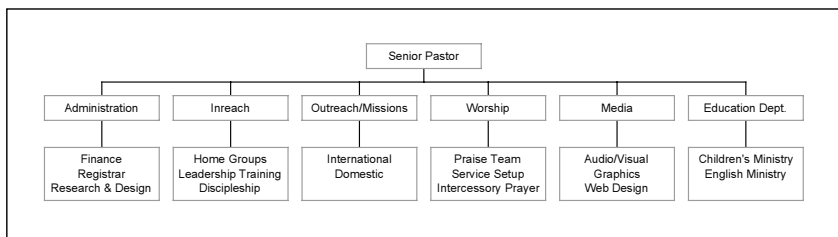


Figure 2
Korean-American church structure.

the tension

Most study participants explained their departure from the first-generation church in terms of the lack of relationship and a difference in values and vision. For example,

When you ask young people why they are leaving the church, they will say, “Oh, because we’re different. It’s cultural. It’s linguistics.” They don’t have the mental capacity to interpret what they are feeling or why they are feeling that way. That’s what I’ve found out. This took me a long time to figure out . . . So the reason they’re leaving is not because of cultural differences. Differences are just what is on the surface.

He further explained that while second-generation pastors often attribute splits to cultural differences, they actually result from the tensions that power struggles engender. These tensions can be understood in terms of communication and expectations.

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Communication

Though working with different generations is often difficult in and of itself, another fuel that adds to the conflict is due to miscommunication. Pastor Derick suggested, “At this moment, everything is scattered, and the whole reason for conflict between EM and KM is mistrust and communication. It just boils down to trust and communication.”

Pastor Ian said, “I would have really liked to have had a better relationship with the head pastor and the staff . . . looking back I now realize, it’s pretty hard to have one when you don’t speak the same language.” Pastor Andy said that when he was serving at a Korean immigrant church, many looked down on him because he was not able to speak the Korean language.

Communication in this context, of course, is not limited to only understanding each other’s language. It also includes communication styles and expectations and failed cross-cultural communication. For example, after sharing his story, pastor Samuel concluded that the fundamental disconnect stemmed from a communication barrier.

When I first sat down with the senior pastor, I told him very clearly, “I definitely want to submit to your leadership, and I want to be a partner with you, but I believe that I know what the second generation needs better than you do because I grew up in that whole context, I know what works and what

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doesn't work. So please trust me. Please listen when I suggest things, and for the first year he did . . . At first he was listening, but then that eventually turned into, "Are you trying to teach me?" "I don't want to sound like I'm trying to teach you. That's not the point. That's not what I'm trying to do. I'm just trying to share. I'm just trying to talk to you and tell you what I'm processing, what I'm dealing with, and what I think is the right thing to do. I'm not trying to teach you, I'm trying to tell you honestly." And all he kept on saying was, "Are you trying to teach me?" And basically, he couldn't get over the way that I was doing it, because in the Korean culture, you're not supposed to share how you feel; you're just supposed to say yes, and not share your thoughts, and if you do share your thoughts and you're open minded, it's kind of taken as rebellious and disrespectful.

I think that the fundamental disconnect is a big communication barrier . . . as long as we're in communication, then everything is okay. We're being respectful of one another. But in the KM mentality, I don't think they feel like they need to communicate with us all the little things. They just tell us what happens after the decision is made . . . It's a difference in cultural communication styles. It's not a proper thing to get in your pastor's face and say, "You're wrong."

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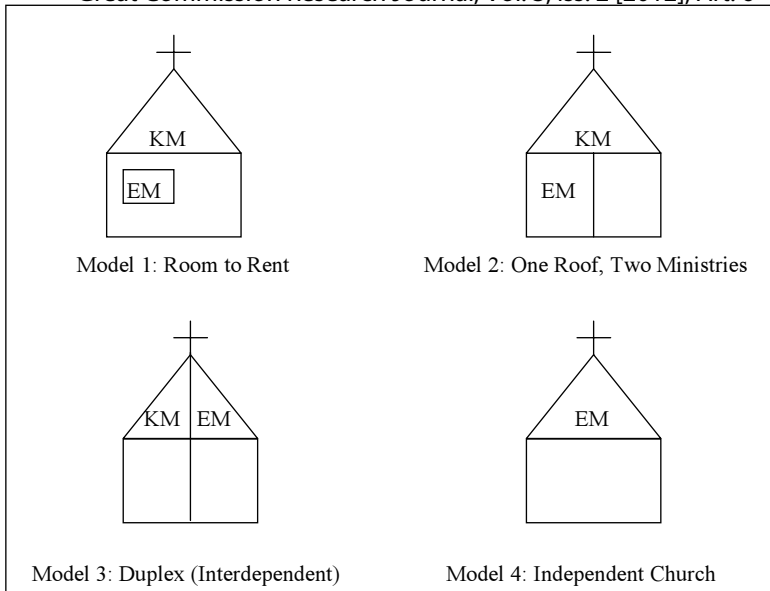
Expectations

Participants also shared that trying to communicate with the first generation is complicated by conflicting expectations that are never clearly articulated. Hence, both generations become frustrated because they assume the other knows, intuitively, what is expected.

In the East, communication is implicit and hierarchical. In the West, it is more explicit and egalitarian.⁷ Hence, first-generation pastors naturally expect subordinate, second-generation pastors to understand what they desire without having to explain. However, when second-generation pastors fail to understand or worse, speak back to the senior pastor, they are considered rude and arrogant.

The reason why there is conflict and disappointment among first- and second-generation is because we think we're very similar, and we get very frustrated when we don't think alike, speak alike, and do things alike. The first generation presumes that the second generation should be like the first, and vice versa. First generations think, "Why don't you look like and think like every other pastor at our church?" And then second generations wonder, "Why don't you look like and talk like the professors at my seminary?" And you know, we say,

⁷ Ibid.

**Figure 3**

English ministry models. Adapted from *English Ministry Models*.

“You’re wrong.” But when you see things differently, different is not wrong. Different is just different. If you call it wrong, then you’re creating separation and not unity.

Nevertheless, separation is often the end result of such tensions because the parties involved fail to understand or tolerate one another’s perspectives.

At this juncture, it is helpful to introduce Sukhwan Oh’s four models of English Ministry in immigrant churches: 1) room to rent, 2) one roof, two ministries, 3) duplex, and 4) independent church (see Figure 3).⁸ As they relate to our study, the models can be seen as describing intergenerational churches before and after a split occurs.

four models of english ministry in intergenerational churches

In the “Room to Rent” model, the EM is part of the larger KM and is assigned a room to use for worship services. Structurally, the EM is completely under the rule and governance of the first-generation senior pastor. The “One Roof, Two Ministries” model is similar in that the EM is still structurally under the KM, but different in that the senior pastor accords the EM greater autonomy, such as in

⁸ Sukhwan Oh, “A Strategy for Planting Cell Based Churches for the Emerging Asian Americans: A Case Study Based on Oikos Community Church.” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998.

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scheduling and budget. The next model, “Duplex,” is interdependent because both ministries agree to serve each other. In this model the EM is administratively autonomous (i.e., own non-profit number, session, pastors, elders, and deacons), but the Korean church provides the EM with a sanctuary and equipment for worship, while the EM provides the KM with a workforce to run their education department. In the last model, the “Independent Church,” no affiliation or association exists, structurally, between the EM and the KM. At this stage, it would be more accurate to call the two ministries separate churches.

The first two models require first- and second-generation pastors to cope continuously with tensions and power struggles for the sake of the church. Model one is likely to engender the kind of frustration previously described. However, model two still requires a large measure of grace and understanding on the part of both generations. Models three and four often represent the result of unresolved power struggles and their ensuing tension.

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The Interdependent Solution

Interestingly, seven of the seventeen study participants adopted the interdependent model when they “separated” from their Korean congregation. One of them commented on his relationship with the KM church.

The bottom line is, any church needs facility, and every Korean church needs Sunday school teachers, and most Sunday school teachers are going to come from English ministries. So there’s a mutual need and a mutual benefit that can be very quickly worked on, and so we forged that by creating significant ways that we could make sure that the partnership is not just language but that it’s actually action.

The KM senior pastor understood that the second generation needs to have a sense of autonomy; this need is to be able to set up our own identity and own ministry culture. So he said, “We’ll support you, we’ll help you, we’ll provide whatever you need, and we just ask that you be in partnership with us.”

This potentially happy and successful model is only possible if the first- and second-generation pastors share a common vision. Another participant said of his current relationship with the KM senior pastor, “It is wonderful because the senior pastors (first-generation senior pastor and second-generation senior pastor) are in absolute agreement with one another. We are complimentary to one another.” When asked how this type of relationship formed in spite of generational and cultural differences, he responded, “Well, [the KM senior pastor] is an unusually kind man . . . I know I made him upset a couple times for sure, and I take full

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responsibility, but he is such a graceful man, and I know that he cares for me as a
person.”

The Independent Solution

Ten of the seventeen participants left the immigrant church to plant new congregations, even though some would have preferred the interdependent model. All wished they could have left on good terms. One participant shared,

If I could do it again, I would ask the senior pastor for his blessing. We ended on not such good terms, a lot of bitterness and hurt . . . the most important thing when you leave to plant your own church is to receive the senior pastor’s blessing.

One participant articulated a vision for church planting separate first- and second-generation churches. “The Korean church needs to let go of the second generation, and they need to give them a chance to do ministry that will become mainstream, that is what they need.” Another explained,

What I adore about [the first generation] they are like Abrahams; they are the frontiers. They came from Korea to start a church, and whether it be for good reasons or for the sake of gathering all the Koreans together, God did something in the midst of that, and I would like to see them passing that on to the next generation, rather than always trying to maintain that for themselves. Like Abraham did to Isaac, that they would pass that on and say, “You go dig your own well and find your place.”

I would like to see more churches being sent out, having support, and not just financial support, but prayer and good relational support. I would like to see more of an environment where spiritual fathers and mothers could point out the gifts of the second generation, and really push them in that calling, and if that calling is to church plant, so be it.

Though second-generation leaders may leave the immigrant church to plant independent churches, they do not necessarily want to sever their cultural roots. Instead, they want to plant churches that effectively reach peoples of all nations, taking advantage of the gift of biculturalism that the Lord has given to second-generation Korean-Americans.

moving forward

The purpose of this study was not to blame one generation or the other. Neither generation is wholly at fault. As Pastor Billy said,

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If there is a problem found in the church, it's a both/and problem. I'm not trying to blame one or the other. Whether it be 80% one and 20% the other, there is still a combination of conflict. So we need to start owning up to our stuff and not play the blame shifting game.

Looking at the situation with hindsight, many participants realized there was a lot of blame shifting when they left the immigrant church.

The second generation, why did they leave? They can't just say, "We're victims. The first generations are tyrants." That's what the younger generation would like to think, but it's not like that. I know some young people who will stick by until the end, and I know others who are just rebels, and for whatever reason, they just badmouth everything and they think if they find a refuge and think it's going to work out, but then what happens? Something may happen that is not favorable to them and they rebound again and again until they eventually forfeit the ministry. Instead of owning their part in this, everything is the blame game. Before long you demonize everybody, and what happens to you? You're not even interested in God anymore.

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What the second generations don't realize is that we have our own set of blinders, our own presuppositions that prevent us from seeing the whole picture. So who's really more righteous? I don't think the second generation is necessarily more righteous, and I can say that because I'm an elder to them. We realize that the young 'uns don't see everything so crystal clear in the way they think they have. So we have to own up to our blind spots, and if we don't, we'll continue to blame each other, we'll never grow beyond that.

For an intergenerational church to thrive, each generation must admit its own mistakes and recognize that all discord is nearly always two-sided. Moving forward involves servant leadership and a "missionary mindset."

Servant Leadership

Participants suggested it is impossible to have two head leaders in one house. The struggle for power will be constant. While society says that leaders must command to gain respect, biblical leaders serve rather than dominate. Part of God's ingenuity is that the Gospel does not impose a cultural uniformity but rather fosters reconciliation.⁹

Robert Greenleaf affirmed,

The servant-leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps

⁹ Eddie Gibbs, *I Believe in Church Growth*. (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 2000), 123.

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because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material
possessions . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-
first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served.¹⁰

For reconciliation to take place, it is crucial that pastors and leaders understand and accept others' culture and worldview, including others' culturally conditioned expression of servant leadership. According to Robert Kelley, followership is actually the key to leadership and reconciliation.¹¹ People must learn to follow in order to become effective leaders. However, in a hierarchical culture, followership also is culturally conditioned and may appear undervalued by those favoring an egalitarian approach.

A Missionary Mindset

In order to mitigate hostility or misunderstandings, individuals need to adopt a "missionary mindset." One generation should approach the other as if it were a "foreign" culture and people. Some participants suggested that tensions and conflict often arise because the first generation expects the second generation to think and act as they do, and vice versa; after all, both generations look the same on the outside. However, the generations differ not only in age but also in culture. One participant even suggested that relating to the other generation is like going on a missions trip.

It's just like we're relating to another culture. If I were a missionary going to China, I'd have to defer to their culture. I would learn to speak in a way where they would learn to hear it. Perhaps we need to take that same attitude as missionaries to the first generation.

Another participant agreed,

What if I was to adopt a missionary mind frame and approach working with the first generation Koreans as if I was a missionary working with them? And so if I were to do that, I would want to learn their culture, I would need to learn their language, and I would need to learn how to create ministry relationships with them that would help them grow and help another separate indigenous group.

The whole approach to [the first and second generation conflict] is a missionary mind frame, having missionary values. And because language, culture, ideals, values, philosophy are, I think in my opinion, so different, we're like two different people groups. There is so much difference in how we think,

¹⁰ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977), 13.

¹¹ Robert Kelley, *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow and Followers Who Lead Themselves*. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1977).

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how we live, and how we view worship, God, church; it's enough of a difference to think of it almost as if I was doing this with, let's say, a Hispanic church or another ethnic church.

Adopting a missionary mindset means recognizing that “different” does not equal “wrong” and taking the initiative to understand and communicate effectively with the “other.”

conclusion

Intergenerational church splits do not just happen. Through this study, we have observed a pattern—identity confusion fuels tension, which in turn generates power struggle. Left unresolved, power struggle eventually leads to separation. However, we believe a painful church split is not the inevitable result. Servant leaders in both generations, adopting a “missionary mindset,” can foster communication, understanding, and mutual appreciation despite cultural and generational differences. They can forge a new path of unity and creative collaboration. We pray this study will help both first- and second-generation Korean immigrant pastors honor our Lord Jesus Christ by contributing effectively to the worldwide expansion of His church.

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