

Spring 2-5-2019

The Epistle of St. Theresa: The Relationship of a Pastor and a Congregation Navigating Change

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THE EPISTLE OF ST. THERESA:
THE RELATIONSHIP OF A PASTOR AND A CONGREGATION NAVIGATING CHANGE

Written by

THERESA CHO

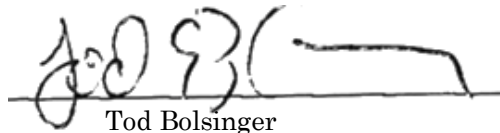
and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


Tod Bolsinger


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Date Received: February 5, 2019

THE EPISTLE OF ST. THERESA:
THE RELATIONSHIP OF A PASTOR AND A CONGREGATION
NAVIGATING CHANGE

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

THERESA CHO
JANUARY 2019

ABSTRACT

The Epistle of St. Theresa: The Relationship of a Pastor and a Congregation Navigating Change

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2019

The purpose of this doctoral project is to develop a framework of how St. John's Presbyterian Church in San Francisco moves from a mono-cultural community to an intercultural and intergenerational community by examining the adaptive changes of leadership and ministry already navigated in an ever-changing culture.

The first section explores how personal and congregational identity interacts within the pastoral and ministry context. A pastor's identity and leadership style influences the capacity a church has to adapt to the changing needs of congregation and community—causing the community to reflect on its shared identity. Therefore, the second part examines the process of change as managing pain and loss as that relates to pastoral and congregational identity. Koreans call this *han* and the untangling of pain, *han-pu-ri*. The first change is how identity is understood. Identity holds many intersections of race, culture, class, gender, and theology. These identities intersect in diverse faith communities—making it both challenging and beneficial as it navigates through adaptive changes. Churches also carry the gravity of pain and loss. Without untangling it, it can be difficult for churches to make necessary adaptive changes. Finally, using the concept of third place/space, a framework of how St. John's church moves from a mono-cultural to an intercultural and intergenerational community is developed.

Ray Oldenburg defines third places as informal gathering areas where strangers and neighbors intersect. The term third space used in Asian American feminist theology refers to the in-between place where identity is tested, erased, and recreated. In order for a congregation to exist as a third place where people intersect their needs and passions as well as embrace its changing identity from a mono-cultural to an intercultural community, a pastor must also have self-understanding and embrace where one stands in the in-between space of congregational and pastoral identity.

Word Count: 300 words

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the women in my life that have shaped me, named me, and nurtured me in who I am and who I am becoming. Thank you to InHo, my partner and best friend, and my children, Ian and Isabella, who make life fun and colorful. Thank you to St. John's Presbyterian Church for your willingness and courage to journey with me as we discover where God is leading. Lastly, thank you Tod for holding space for me as this paper unfolded, pushing me when I did not want to be pushed, and cheering me on to the very end.

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PART ONE

PASTORAL AND MINISTRY CONTEXT

WATER 水 (SOO)

INTRODUCTION

St. John's Presbyterian Church in Reno, Nevada was the first church I stepped into at the age of eight. St. John's church had that suburban church look: expansive campus, green lawns, and triangular shaped sanctuary building. It was not uncommon for a Korean congregation to rent out space at a local Presbyterian church and worship in the afternoon. My family began attending not because we were Christian. We attended because we were Korean. There is a saying that wherever two or more Koreans gather together, you will find a church. Church is where people talked, smelled, behaved, and ate the same. It was just as much a community center and social service as it was a church. Church on Sunday was an all-day event. My mother prepared the lunch with the church ladies in the morning. In the late morning, I went to Sunday School or youth group while my parents went to worship service. Afterwards, we ate lunch together—a full Korean feast that often included rice, soup, and homemade kimchi. The afternoon was filled with choir practice, Bible study, and meetings. My dad was usually in the church office counting the offering money and neatly documenting it in a ledger. I loved Sundays—the one day in the week where I could be myself and be with people who shared the same lived experience.

When I accepted my first call as the associate pastor at St. John's Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, I felt I had come full circle. The name of the church was an eerie coincidence of firsts for me: my first church as a child and now my first church as a pastor. Both are Presbyterian congregations. The Presbyterian Church was the first to accept my family as non-believers. Although I roamed away from the denomination throughout my childhood, it welcomed me back when I felt called to ministry. Unlike St.

John's church in Reno, the one in San Francisco was located in a crowded urban city and had over a hundred years' worth of history. The creaky old wooden structure and the dark nooks and crannies made any youth lock-in a haunting experience. These two St. John's churches were also mono-cultural communities with a Korean male pastor serving a Korean congregation and a white male pastor serving a mostly white congregation.

I served as an associate pastor for ten years. I am the first female pastor at St. John's church in its 147 years. I am also considered the first racial ethnic pastor—except for a brief period, which I will elaborate on later. My presence was a litmus test for whether St. John's church was ready to change along with the changing neighborhood demographics. When I began, I was newly married and fairly new to the city. Both my children were born at the hospital located across the street from the church. They were baptized at St. John's church and grew up calling my head of staff "Uncle John." For some, having a female pastor was enough of a change. Having a female pastor who is pregnant with her first child within the first year of her employment tipped the scale. Sparked by my needs as a pastor and mother, many changes were made to worship, the sanctuary space, the style of leadership, and programming so that everything that happened at St. John's church was intergenerational and suitable for adults with children. This was not a fast shift, but a slow ten-year shift to becoming an intergenerational congregation.

After ten years, I went from associate pastor to co-pastor with Rev. John Anderson. I was unprepared for how different the shift of associate to co-pastor would be. The weight of leading this congregation increased. Equally, I felt the most creative, empowered, and excited about the future as well. My daughter must have also sensed the

shift—asking me when St. John’s Presbyterian Church would be renamed St. Theresa’s Presbyterian Church. To her, the logic was simple: John, St. John’s and Theresa, St. Theresa’s. In the reasoning of my young daughter, the church name had everything to do with the pastor. I could have explained to her that the pastor is not the church, but the people are the church. However, she was eight and her statement had elements of prophetic truth. While the church is not centered on the pastor, a church is imprinted by the pastor’s leadership style, ministry impact, and pastoral presence. As my leadership and position have grown at St. John’s church so have my voice and my presence. Gradually, St. John’s church is becoming St. Theresa’s church.

During my fifteen years, the church has changed from an aging congregation to a congregation of all ages. St. John’s church has also changed from a mostly white congregation to a growingly diverse community in race, class, sexual orientation, and faith. Rev. John Anderson will soon retire after twenty-eight years. As he leaves, I wonder what residual benefits I have received in pastoral authority from my co-pastor who is a tall white male will remain. I have always pushed the congregation outside its comfort zone. Rev. Anderson has been an excellent partner in receiving criticism and backlash whenever changes were made—backing me up and supporting my decisions. When visitors ask for the pastor, he refers to both of us—knowing that people would not consider me as a pastor at first glance. He removed all hierarchy in the way we were referred to in the worship bulletin, the website, and the outside signs, calling us both pastors versus pastor and associate pastor. While St. John’s church is more diverse, I wonder how my pastoral identity as a woman and a Korean American will affect the future of St. John’s church as the remaining pastor.

This question leads me to examine the past fifteen years of adaptive changes that St. John's church has already navigated and develop a framework of how the church moves from a mono-cultural community to an intercultural and intergenerational community led by a pastor who represents a different cultural makeup and generation. Often, when churches are searching for ways to become younger or more diverse, churches hire a pastor that represents that demographic. Churches who want to welcome young families hire a pastor with young children. Churches who want to attract the growing (insert ethnic group here) population hire a pastor from that ethnic group. St. John's church was no different. I was originally hired as an associate pastor to attract the growing number of Chinese American families moving into the neighborhood. However, it is more complicated. In order to avoid technical and cosmetic solutions, churches must intentionally adapt and allow changes to seep into the DNA of the congregation.

How does a church invite the Other into their space so that the Other not only feels a sense of belonging, but a contributing partner in ministry? Growing up in a Korean church in a mostly white suburban city, I remember what it means to feel accepted, welcomed, and nurtured at church. Growing up in the United States in a Korean immigrant family, I had to navigate between places where I attempted to fit in, adapt, and assimilate—finding pockets of acceptance veiled in tokenism and niceties. Being an inclusive diverse community is more difficult than existing as an aging congregation or a mono-cultural church. If fully embraced, the difficult journey can be incredibly transformational for both the pastor and the congregation.

In studying adaptive change in organizational structures, terms such as creating holding environments, surviving sabotage, getting on the balcony, addressing the

adaptive challenge, exploring competing values, and discovering code are commonly used. In theory, these concepts make sense. I can see the “adaptive change” fog lift as my “adaptive change” vocabulary expands. Yet, as I attempt to put these concepts into practice, I see my ability to live out and lead adaptive change slipping through my fingers. It is easier to read about adaptive change than to put it into practice. The biggest challenge is most books on adaptive leadership and adaptive change focus on structural changes and processes but do not consider how leading adaptive change differs in a diverse environment or when led by someone who is different from the makeup of the congregation.

In a mono-cultural communal setting, adaptive change is ambitious and demanding. In an intercultural communal setting, adaptive change is compounded with intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and much more. Mutual transformation of the leader and congregation must happen. If St. John’s church wants to be a more intercultural community, what transformation must happen so that it embodies the community it wishes to be? As a leader, what transformation must take place within me in order to navigate St. John’s church through the necessary adaptive changes? The goal of this paper is to examine how St. John’s church shifted to an intergenerational community and apply that framework as the church becomes an intercultural community.

While the terms multi-generational, cross-generational, and intergenerational are sometimes used interchangeably, the use of the term “intergenerational” is intentional. Multi-generational communities are communities where people of different ages are tolerated. There is no deeper interaction required. Cross-generational communities may interact with sharing and listening, but little individual or communal transformation takes

place. Intergenerational communities intentionally combine generations together in service, sharing, and learning.¹ “In the intergenerational environment, there is comprehensive mutuality, equality, and reciprocity that makes individual or collective transformation more likely.”² This concept applies when distinguishing between multi-cultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural communities. Debbie Irving sums it up this way: “Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.”³ St. John’s church aims at not just being a multi-cultural faith community where different culture groups co-exist, but an intercultural faith community where there is a mutual exchange of sharing and learning and deep relationships are cultivated.

This paper is divided into Water, Fire, and Wind/Spirit. Water is a biblical symbol connected to images of creation, baptism, and moments of change. In Part One, this paper explores how personal and congregational identity connect with the pastoral and ministry context by framing identity in terms of baptism and being created in the diverse image of God as well as exploring the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s identity as “reformed and always reforming.”⁴ For the Presbyterian Church, the change process is in the DNA. As the Church moves from Christendom to post-Christendom, the Church’s call is found in its DNA. This section also explores the context of my personal and pastoral identity as well as the church context of St. John’s Presbyterian Church. The relationship between a

¹ Holly Catterton Allen, ed. *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry* (Abilene: Abilene Christian UP, 2018), 17.

² Allen, *InterGenerate*, 18.

³ Debby Irving, *Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* (Cambridge: Elephant Room Press, 2014), Kindle location 3,480.

⁴ F-2.02, Book of Order 2017-2019: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II.

congregation and pastor is symbiotic—mutually benefitting and impacting one another’s identity, call, and ministry.

Fire is a catalyst for change. Fire has the ability to change the landscape, destroy life, or trigger new growth. In Part Two, the paper examines the process of change in an intercultural setting by exploring identity through the lens of intersectionality and the task of managing pain and loss. Intersectionality is the study of how individual identities live within structural systems and sites of marginalization.

To further explore the intersection of personal and congregational identity, the terms “third place” and “third space” are defined. Third place is a term that Ray Oldenburg uses for public gathering places where values of inclusivity and diversity are nurtured.⁵ Third space is a term used in Asian American theology to refer to the in-between place where identity is split apart, unsettled, erased, and broken down.⁶ For St. John’s church, a mostly white affluent congregation—where only white men have served as pastors—intersections of race, gender, and class have never been addressed. However, reframing identity is necessary if St. John’s church wants to exist as an intercultural and intergenerational community. St. John’s church must explore the third space of their mono-cultural identity in order to adapt to an intercultural third place. While St. John’s church exploration of third space will be different than my own, the intersection of my journey and St. John’s church journey is where mutual transformation exists.

⁵ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1989), Kindle location 22.

⁶ Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 62.

As St. John's church begins to rethink the intersectionality of identity and the dynamics of diversity such as inside/outside, center/margin, and us/them, how does St. John's church live out the greatest commandment to love God "with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind," and love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:37)?⁷ In other words, how does a mono-cultural church begin to love a neighbor that is not of the same identity background? Eric Law says, "Inclusion of outsiders has to require the existing community to let go of self-preservation."⁸ In a way, third space allows one to claim and let go of cultural definitions that keep a community locked into one way of existing in order to recreate a new sense of communal identity that encompasses other influences. Existing as a third place is the practice that strengthens a community in letting go of self-preservation as it requires a continuous inclusion of outsiders. Included in Part Two is a theological approach for St. John's church to be a third place so as the diversity of the neighborhood changes, the church transforms to a community that is inclusive of the Other.

Wind symbolizes the Pentecostal spirit that weaves in between the spaces of a congregation—giving them the strength to celebrate the diversity that exists. Part Three develops a process of how St. John's church is moving from a mono-cultural to an intercultural and intergenerational community by using the concept of third place/space. This section examines the process of change and navigating loss of prior identity for both the church and the pastor. As the church changed, my ability to manage my own transformational process was crucial to my capacity to provide adaptive leadership. This

⁷ All Scripture quoted is from the Common English Bible, unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Eric H. F. Law, *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 14.

process of navigating change guides St. John's church as it begins to exist as a third place and serve undocumented immigrants living in the surrounding neighborhood.

This paper is woven together with storytelling of my personal identity and faith journey and the history of St. John's church and its people. I use storytelling for two reasons. First, storytelling reflects its importance in the adaptive change process. Storytelling is how a church's code is discovered. Brené Brown says, "Stories are data with a soul."⁹ Where opinions tend to be black and white and divide people into them and us, stories are multi-colored and render people vulnerable, bringing people together.¹⁰ When church people tell stories, they reveal the values, heroes, myths, and traditions of the church. "Each church has a unique story, or defining code, within the larger story of its denomination. And within the code of a specific local church, each person, connecting with others in creative community, has a particular role to play expressed through a personal code."¹¹

Storytelling is also how people discover how their personal stories connect to God's narrative. Rachel Held Evans says God is a storyteller and therefore as human beings created in God's image, "we are storytelling creatures because we are fashioned in the image of a storytelling God."¹² C. S. Song calls this *story theology*, where the stories

⁹ Brené Brown, "Research," *Brené Brown*, accessed November 11, 2018, <https://brenebrown.com/the-research/>.

¹⁰ DeBoer, "Faith Storytelling with All Ages," in *InterGenerate*, 216.

¹¹ Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Tyndale House Publishing, 2007), Kindle Locations 825-827.

¹² Rachel Held Evans, *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2018), 164.

of God and God's people intersect. It is not neutral. A neutral theology is a homeless and tasteless theology.¹³ Story theology is rooted in the intersection of God and God's people.

Secondly, my transformation as a pastor is connected with the transformation of St. John's church. Tod Bolsinger says, "Leadership in uncharted territory requires and results in transformation of the whole organization, starting with the leaders."¹⁴ This paper is not just about creating a structural framework and programmatic plan. It is a reflection on a journey about the intersection of pastoral identity formation, congregational identity rediscovery, and congregational missional transformation. Without the stories of the mutual transformation of St. John's church and myself, the framework reduces to another change tool or metaphor. This does not mean this framework alone is not useful but it is not intended to generate the same results for other church contexts because adaptive change is about the transformation of people in a community in order to face their external, environmental and missional challenges. This framework is one way St. John's church mobilized its people and adapted in order to face the challenge head on and thrive—"to take the best from its history into the future."¹⁵

Adaptive change is about a church finding its sense of ministry in their particular context with these particular people in this particular time. To eliminate my stories as a Korean American woman from the equation of building a framework for St. John's church, a predominantly white church, as it evolves into an intercultural faith community

¹³ C. S. Song, *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 31.

¹⁴ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 45.

¹⁵ Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Harvard Business Review, 2009), Kindle location 378.

would be disingenuous to the process St. John's church went through and the interconnection between pastoral and congregational identity. Storytelling reveals truth and exposes biases. This kind of storytelling is called counteremory because it "aims at challenging versions of reality put forward by the dominant culture."¹⁶ To move from teaching the status quo to teaching for change is to give witness to a different reality.

¹⁶ Cody J. Sanders and Angela Yarber, *Microaggressions in Ministry: Confronting the Hidden Violence of Everyday Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 59.

CHAPTER 1

PERSONAL AND CONGREGATIONAL IDENTITY

There are many images of water in the Bible: dangerous waters, life-giving waters, absence of water, living water, and still waters. Life depends on water. The human body is made of up to 60 percent water. I was born and grew up near the waters in Florida. Even though my family lived on the eastern coast of Florida, the Indian River cushioned us from the rough waves of the Atlantic Ocean. The water was still, calm, and quiet. As an adult, I still live by the water. The waters of the Pacific Ocean are colder, but my children are also growing up near the water like I did.

When my son was born, he was the first boy to be born of his generation on my husband's side of the family. In Korean tradition, the oldest male on the father's side names the next generation. My son's great grandfather had the task to choose not only my son's name, but also a part of the name that my son's generation of cousins and siblings would share. Korean names are usually two syllables. My son's great grandfather chose *Soo* (수) for one of the syllables. There are many meanings for *Soo*, but the hanja¹ that he chose carried the meaning "water." However, for my son's great grandfather, *Soo* does not refer to any kind of water, but the "still waters" described in Psalm 23.

¹ *Hanja* refers to Chinese characters incorporated into the Korean language.

I am not certain why he chose the image of “still water” to be embedded in the name of my son and his generation. He had lived through turbulent waters in his life and his faith had been the source of “living water” (Jn 4:10) for him. Therefore, maybe his hope was for the next generation to experience more still and calm waters. Whatever the reason, every child in my son’s generation carries the syllable *Soo*. My son’s name is Soo Jin, which means “treasure in the water.” My daughter’s name is Soo Yun, which means “water lily.” My nephew and niece are Soo Hyun and Soo Chung. The “still water” is not only their name, but also their own identity given to them by their community. Gloria Anzaldúa says, “Identity, like a river, is always changing, always in transition, always in *nepantla*. Like the river downstream, you’re not the same person you were upstream. You begin to define yourself in terms of who you are becoming, not who you have been.”² The “still waters” that St. John’s church and I reside in now are not at the beginning or the end of the river, but right in the middle as we explore and define our identity—both personal and communal.

Baptism and Call

In Matthew 3:16-17, Jesus approaches John the Baptist to be baptized. Afterwards, Jesus’s identity is revealed to those who could hear that indeed Jesus is God’s own son whom God dearly loves and finds delight. Therefore, baptism is about identity: Jesus’s identity as God’s son and our identity as God’s children.

In the Presbyterian denomination, infants are baptized. As infants, they have done nothing in particular to deserve or not deserve God’s love. Every time a child is baptized, worshippers are invited to remember their baptism—not the physical event, but the

² *Nepantla* is a Nahuatl word meaning “in-between space.” Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015), 135.

meaning. What Christians are invited to remember is God's love, forgiveness, grace, and compassion are not dependent upon anything done, but because of who God is.

When I remember the sacrament of baptism, I remember a time when my baptismal identity was easily embraced. The first five years of my life were quite blissful. My childhood memories are flooded with experiences of being in the water. My home was walking distance from the Indian River filled with crabs, fish, oysters, and clams. My backyard was a seafood market within arm's reach. My family often swam to the island nearby and played "keep away" with the dolphins that tried to steal our picnic lunch. My first tug-of-war game was with a sea bass that refused to let the weak arms of a five-year-old reel it in. My first kick ball was a dead man-of-war that washed up on shore and resulted in swollen feet for days. My neighbors, whom I adopted as my American grandparents, often took me out on their speedboat, which was also the main stage for my many reenactments of scenes I saw watching "Days of Our Lives" with my American grandmother. Even when I was not near the water, I imagined myself in water. My father would find me standing in a trashcan filled to the brim with water as I closed my eyes and imagined myself swimming in an Olympic-sized pool. These waters where I was born are where I felt fully loved by my parents, my American grandparents, and nature. I had no awareness of being different, not good enough, or unwelcomed. Much like Jesus was claimed as a dearly beloved child, I felt dearly beloved by those around me.

These same waters, though, were the most chaotic for my parents. My parents had just emigrated from South Korea so that my father could finish his master's degree at the Florida Institute of Technology. Everything was a struggle: making ends meet, finding decent paying jobs, understanding American culture and language, and being separated

from family and responsibilities. While their identity was being tested, mine was just forming.

In the Gospel of Luke's version of Jesus's baptism, the Holy Spirit immediately leads Jesus out into the wilderness. In the wilderness, Jesus faces every shadow that his baptismal identity encompasses: desire, power, and fortitude. After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus receives his call. His call and ministry are rooted in his baptismal identity—shadows and all.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk 4:18-19)

Living into my baptismal identity is the adaptive challenge I am trying to address as a child of God, a person, a daughter, a wife, a mother, and especially as a pastor. Identity work is crucial to adaptive change because adaptive change challenges how people define themselves—creating feelings of loss, incompetence, and resistance to change.³ My own acceptance of first my baptismal, and then my pastoral identity is also directly equated to my acceptance and understanding of my own gender, race, status, and understanding of others. My identity as a second-generation Korean American woman cannot be separated from who I am as a pastor and how people engage with me as a pastor.

The baptismal lens I see through is not 2020. It is not clear. My view is a kaleidoscope where what I see is refracted by outside forces and my vision is distorted into many shapes and sizes. My baptismal lens is also not telescopic where my view can make clear a narrow distant spot ahead as well as give me a projected path to place my

³ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Harvard Business Review, 2002), 30.

goals, ambitions, and expectations. My view is much more microscopic—down to the very molecular structure. Every path needs to be observed, assessed, managed, and manipulated. With such a limited view, clarity on my baptismal and therefore pastoral identity is easily lost. Because the lens I look through is how people identify me, I have to re-imagine and rediscover who I am. Heifetz and Linsky claim that leadership is dangerous because leaders put themselves on the line when they tell people what they need to hear instead of what they want to hear. “People must face the challenge of adapting to a tough reality, and the adaptation requires giving up an important value or a current way of life. Leadership becomes dangerous, then, when it must confront people with loss.”⁴ If I am asking as a leader for people in my congregation to change habits and values that make up their identity, I must be willing to do that same work.

Personal Identity as a Child of God

C. S. Song says that as a child of God, we reflect the image of God when we look in the mirror. However, “sometimes we lament over what we see in the mirror because there seems to be no resemblance to the beauty, dignity, and loftiness of traditional theological works.”⁵ Growing up in the church, I thought God and I resembled nothing of each other. Whether I was specifically taught God was an old white man with facial hair or that image was subliminally impressed on me, I never believed I was created in the image of God. As I grew older and my faith matured, I wondered what it meant to be created in the image of God as a Korean American daughter of an immigrant.

⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

⁵ Song, *Tell Us Our Names*, 4.

God's most beautiful creations are often formed out of chaotic voids. In Genesis 1:1-2, God created heaven and earth out of chaotic void: "When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters." After each creation, God called it good. After God created everything, God invited the human to participate in that creation by naming all the living things. Anzaldúa describes creation as "a rearrangement or reordering of preexisting elements."⁶ The more years I am removed from those blissful memories by the water, the more distance there is between my understanding of my baptismal identity and the reality of where the world places me. That is not the case for my children.

While I grew up always being different in color, smell, and sight, my children grew up in an environment that celebrated who they are. They did not have to attend a Korean church to find people like them. Every day in San Francisco, they encountered people from different cultures, spoke different languages, and ate different foods. They attend a public school that has a Korean language immersion program. Their school celebrates Korean Thanksgiving and Lunar New Year by wearing Korean traditional hanboks and eating Korean food. Lunchtime, they eat kimchi fried rice while their friends eat Russian meatballs, spam musubi, or matzo ball soup. Their baptismal identity and where the world places them are in sync. They are not pigeonholed into a stereotype. They are able to be themselves. When I look at them, I see a version of myself that could have been or may become. Therefore, my call journey involves a process that Anzaldúa says "calls forth *conocimiento*, a higher awareness and consciousness that brings you into

⁶ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 40.

deeper connection with yourself and your materials.”⁷ This process draws conflicting impulses to reconciliation.

Some of those conflicting impulses are rooted in my competing identities. I am both Korean and American. I am both a daughter of immigrants and an American-born citizen. I am both a woman as well as a daughter, wife, sister, and mother. I am both a Korean American woman and a pastor. However, it is not these competing identities that form my complete identity. It is the interaction of these competing identities that form my understanding of my baptismal identity and my sense of call.⁸ My awareness of how my identity encompass these competing identities expand my capacity to lead St. John’s church to see the competing identities that hold the communal identity of St. John’s church. A part of my call is accepting God’s invitation to participate in the creative process of naming all these living aspects within me and recognizing that all of these are reflected in who I am, created in God’s image.

Communal Identity as a Faith Community

Since the beginning, God created humans to be in community. Throughout the Old Testament, God taught and re-taught the people of Israel how to live in community: how to love one another, be accountable to one another, and worship with one another. Throughout the Prophets, God reminded the people of Israel that God has not forsaken them even when they were without land and home.

Jeremiah 29:11-14 is a balm for the people of Israel who are exiled in Babylon:

I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope . . . I will gather you from

⁷ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 40-41.

⁸ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 66.

all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the Lord.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God's promise of ending captivity and returning the people of Israel from exile was reiterated to the remaining leaders of Israel—the few from the first generation who were exiled in Babylon. These remaining few are aging and dying. They are witnessing the second-generation acclimate to Babylonian culture, have their own families, lose the urgency of returning home, and forget the promise that God made them. Yet, with these words of hope, God also gives them instructions while they wait. They are not to wait idly by, but settle down, work, have a family, increase in number, engage in the welfare of the city, and pray to the Lord (Jer 29:5-7). These words that Jeremiah spoke were not the hopeful message that the people of Israel wanted to hear. The message seems contrary to what God promised. Jeremiah's insistence on submission to the Babylonian community made him a traitor in the eyes of the people of Israel.⁹

Like the people of Israel during this time, church today has been described as being in exile now that the church no longer lives in Christendom.¹⁰ Lee Beach says exile is not limited to a geographical location but can be a cultural and spiritual condition as well. “It is an experience of knowing one is an alien, and perhaps even in a hostile environment where the dominant values run counter to one's own.”¹¹ The feelings of disconnection, loneliness, isolation, misdirection, and loss are prevalent. David Congdon

⁹ Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, “Bitter Melon, Bitter Delight,” in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, eds. Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Seung Ai Yang (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 168.

¹⁰ Lee Beach, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom* (Downers Grove: IV Press, 2015), 20.

¹¹ Beach, *The Church in Exile*, 21.

disagrees with using the metaphor that the church today is in exile. “Thinking of the church as exiled from a particular culture further implies the church has its own.”¹² If the church is to embody this exilic identity then according to Congdon there are only two options: imperialism or separatism. Either the church conquers the other culture and spreads its culture or the church separates itself and preserves its own culture.¹³

Congdon’s comment is an important distinction. The church needs to discern what it is feeling exiled from: a time when churches were vibrant and growing or a time when churches had greater influence and power in society; a time when the church was filled with like-minded people, similar liturgical style and theological beliefs or a time when the church had a clear sense of who belonged and who did not belong. While the church today may exhibit feelings of exile, the church cannot make a direct comparison to the people of Israel who were captives in Babylon. The church has deep roots in colonization as the church spread the gospel to other countries and other peoples. Acknowledging this difference is important so the church does not mistakenly overlook its imperialistic tendencies to conquer the Other. Instead, the church must examine ways they intentionally and unintentionally claim white privilege and authority over the Other.

Whether the church today is in exile or not, the church behaves as if it is—asking questions such as “when will God return churches back to the heydays of filled pews, vibrant programming, and children-filled Sunday Schools?” As church communities are aging, the first generation of post-Christendom is losing hope they will ever return to the glory days. As the second-generation begins to live their own lives, acclimate to the ever-

¹² David Congdon, “No, The American Church isn’t ‘in Exile,’” *Sojourners*, April 19, 2017, <https://sojo.net/articles/no-american-church-isn-t-exile>.

¹³ Congdon, “No, The American Church isn’t ‘in Exile,’” *Sojourners*.

growing diverse culture, the urgency of returning to Christendom is waning. The church needs to face the reality that the pews will not only be filled with people who are white and straight; and diversity is limited to gender and age. The beauty of diversity is that the church has no control over how diversity manifests. Everyone struggles to find footing in this post-Christendom place, but some will find the challenge stimulating and creative, while others struggle to let go of how the church used to be.

There are not many at St. John's church who remember the glory days: the days when membership reached 900, plenty of programs existed to serve military families in the Presidio, and the youth group was bustling. While the symptoms of exile may not stem from a longing for the glory days, St. John's church is full of transplants into San Francisco who have little to no family support, which manifest symptoms of exile. There is a sense of loneliness. Hence, many people move out of the city after two or three years. St. John's church struggles with competing identities as a century old church whose members work in a fast-paced technology industry; a mostly-white church located in an increasingly diverse neighborhood; a church that depends on long-term membership and its membership constantly changes.

With the constant change in people and demographics, how does St. John's church address the loneliness people feel as well as maintain some sense of structure for stability? As the technology industry grows in San Francisco, more and more technology companies are building campuses that provide all the needs for their employees: daycare, meals, lounges, and play areas. There is no need to leave the campus to engage with city life. New transplants therefore are not rooted or invested in the life of San Francisco. They do not settle down, build, plant, and engage in the welfare of the city. With the

isolation and separation these campuses foster, how does St. John's church help people recognize the neighbor and engage face-to-face interactions in order to increase the connections people may establish with one another? These questions tug at the anxiety and fear that St. John's church has because it calls them to let go of traits that they associate and treasure about St. John's church. The more St. John's church cannot answer these questions, the more they are forced to face the tension of their competing identities such as traditional yet casual and historic yet contemporary.

Jeremiah's words of hope to build homes and settle down may give a pathway forward. Garret Galvin points out that recent scholarship argues that this passage is aimed at the 1.5 generation and not their parents as they are the ones who emigrated as adolescents and would be getting married and building houses.¹⁴ As much as they are in need of hearing messages of hope from God, Jeremiah sees the immigrant as destined by God to make their new home a better place. "Jeremiah's letter offers a formula for transformation. Hope replaces despair as immigrants can get better jobs and put down roots where they live . . ." ¹⁵

Ngan believes settling down does not mean assimilating into the dominant cultural views. "We cannot simply accept the status quo and enjoy the privileges that come from coalescing with the dominant culture while others are disenfranchised. We have benefited much from the civil rights movement, but the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is far from realized. How should we use our power and privileges for the betterment of society,

¹⁴ Garret Galvin, "Commentary on Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7," *Working Preacher*, October 13, 2013, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1773.

¹⁵ Galvin, "Commentary on Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7," *Working Preacher*.

to be the hand and feet of the powerless?”¹⁶ Asian Americans have long subjected themselves to dominant culture, trying to turn the bitter melon into a sweet and more palatable cantaloupe or honeydew. However, settling down does not mean we are to appease, but instead work towards a just world.

This means that St. John’s church must engage the world and its neighbors as St. John’s church enters into the creative process of naming all the life-giving aspects within its communal identity so that it may understand how its competing identities shape its mission and sense of call. As the interaction of its competing identities come into play, St. John’s church must settle down and be a full participant in the good of the neighborhood as it re-imagines and discovers its new identity—an identity that will have essence of its DNA, yet it may be “rearranged and reordered” so that there will be a deeper alignment and connection between St. John’s church and the world it is called to engage in. This is a work that St. John’s church cannot venture alone, but it must involve the community as a way of being a third place—where people come and go leaving impressions and fingerprints of who they are.

Growing up in an immigrant family, the feelings of exile are not unfamiliar. My parents acclimated to American culture very well. While my family mostly ate Korean food, they never taught me the Korean language or adhered to Korean customs. As a second-generation Korean American, I grew up living an American life, yet yearning to understand my Korean roots as well. Bridging two cultures and weaving through two customs has been a life of exile: never feeling rooted, accepted, or at home. Because I am in both American and Korean cultures, I enter into a lifelong journey of moving from exile from both cultures to finding roots in both cultures.

¹⁶ Ngan, “Bitter Melon, Bitter Delight,” in *Off the Menu*, 179.

To better understand my mother, I tried to learn how to cook Korean food. I wanted to know her secrets, her techniques, and her sense of taste. She once showed me how to make bulgogi (불고기)—thinly cut slices of beef marinated in a mixture of soy sauce, sugar, and other flavorful ingredients. Under her guidance, she instructed me on what to put in, how to do it, and how much. The experience was frustrating. My mother’s cooking style was not easy to follow. It was not organized or pre-meditated. Everything was based on how she felt in that moment. There were no exact measurements and strategies—just handfuls and mixtures of this and that. After I mixed in all the ingredients and re-mixed in more ingredients, she told me to dip my finger in the marinade and tell her how it tasted. I could not tell the difference. It just tasted like sweet soy sauce. She then dipped her finger into the marinade, added a few more ingredients and then had me taste it from her finger. The taste was different. From my finger, the taste was plain, but from my mom's finger, it tasted full of flavor. I tasted the bitterness through the sweet marinade—the bitterness of her father who abandoned his family; of leaving her mother and sisters to join her husband’s family; of marriage to a man who was ambition-oriented; of leaving her first-born daughter in Korea while she moved to the United States with my father so that he could study; and of working many days and nights at the dry cleaners to support her family.

The taste from my mother’s fingertips is key to Korean cooking. “A cook’s hands decide the flavor of the food.”¹⁷ Koreans call this *son mat* (손맛) which means the taste of one’s hands. Korean dishes are made and mixed by hand. *Son mat* is not just a cooking technique; it is a communal experience. Roy Choi, who started the Korean taco craze in

¹⁷ Lee, “Re-creating Our Mother’s Dishes,” in *Off the Menu*, 294.

Los Angeles and runs one of the most successful food trucks, describes *son mat* as sitting around a table as a child and having food shoved in the mouth like a conveyor belt by adults.¹⁸ *Son mat* is also scientific—different hands offer a particular flavor even when cooking the same dish. Rob Dunn says that hands collect data from the daily experiences of life and record different stories of one person from another. The bacteria and microbes found on hands determine the taste of the food.¹⁹

Making bulgogi was more than passing down my mother’s recipe to me; it was passing down all the bitterness from her *son mat*—all the storytelling microbes that recorded her day. Boyung Lee says her mother told her the first step in cooking is to start with a dish you have eaten many times before and remember the taste. Become familiar with every flavor and try to create the taste by using the same ingredients. “Then as I re-create the dish from my memory,” her mother continued, “I will create something of my own.”²⁰ This is easier said than done because my mother’s lived experience colored and flavored her food while my food remained tasteless from my numbed experience. I am still not comfortable cooking Korean food, but I have learned to eat it and memorize the taste.

Learning to cook with *son mat* is doing what C. S. Song calls regaining the theological taste. By learning to cook from my mother’s *son mat* and recognize the taste, I am discovering and rediscovering who I am. In churches, the theological *son mat* is

¹⁸ Renee Montagne, “LA Food Truck King Tells His Story, One Recipe At A Time,” November 5, 2013, in *Morning Edition*, podcast, 3:13, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2013/11/05/243016353/1-a-food-truck-king-tells-his-story-one-recipe-at-a-time>

¹⁹ Rob Dunn, *Never Home Alone: From Microbes to Millipedes, Camel Crickets, and Honeybees, the Natural History of Where We Live* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 233.

²⁰ Lee, “Re-creating Our Mother’s Dishes,” in *Off the Menu*, 293.

discovered and rediscovered at the Lord's Table—same bread and same cup. As the bread is torn and the tips of fingers dip into the cup, participants leave their *son mat* and their stories for others to taste. The table is where stories are shared and bread is broken from different hands. The table is where community is fed, nurtured, created, and established. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is vital to the Christian practice of community. It is a meal prepared by God. It is a meal where all are invited. It is a meal where lives intersect. Churches are usually known for their potluck casseroles, but how to move beyond the one note flavor of baked starch and carbohydrates and move towards a global table of flavors that is representative of the surrounding neighbors is the task of creating a theological taste—some may be palatable and some may stretch the understanding of deliciousness.

There is a reason my food remains tasteless. The more I try to be more than who I am created to be—the model minority who does no wrong and gets good grades; the obedient daughter who redeems her parent's sacrifice; the American who speaks with a flawless accent and is culturally assimilated to all things American; and the perfect pastor who never makes a mistake, the longer my food will have no flavor and contribute nothing to the feast that is set on the table that resembles something of my own creation. The same is for St. John's church. The longer St. John's church resists or ignores tasting all the ingredients that encompass who they are—including white and social class privilege and heteronormativity, they will not be able to taste the stories of the Other for what it is and allowing those flavors to influence the way future meals are prepared and cooked. They will also be more susceptible to appropriating those flavors of the Other rather than letting those flavors transform and readjust their palate.

David Chang, a chef and restaurateur, calls comfort home cooking ugly delicious food. It is not meant to be served in the restaurant. It is not refined. It is not pretty, but it is what the body craves.²¹ Bodies crave a place that is nostalgic of home and a sense of belonging. Home cooking allows people to remember who they are and where they came from. Home cooking draws people out of exile. In the movie *Ratatouille*, food critic Anton Ego has the power to destroy any restaurant establishment with just one negative review. The future of the restaurant, *Gusteau*, rests upon a positive review from Anton. He is served ratatouille—a French vegetable stew—not a dish expected to be served in a fine dining establishment. Even though the ratatouille has undergone a refined makeover, the flavors send Anton back in time to his mother’s kitchen. What is more surprising is that the fingers that made this edible time machine are the *son mat* of a rat. From the *son mat* of a rat, a home cooked dish was recreated by marrying the tastes of the homeland with a new flare of the present. Anton says,

“There are times when a critic truly risks something, and that is in the discovery and defense of the new. The world is often unkind to new talent, new creations. The new needs friends. Last night, I experienced something new: an extraordinary meal from a singularly unexpected source. To say that both the meal and its maker have challenged my preconceptions about fine cooking is a gross understatement. They have rocked me to my core.”²²

The church is to be a community of co-creators and co-namers—both first and second-generations as well as the generations to come. As St. John’s church journeys to evolve from a mono-cultural community to a third place, St. John’s must venture into claiming their third space—the space in between competing identities—by allowing itself

²¹ *Ugly Delicious*, “Home Cooking,” Episode 3, Directed by Eddie Schmidt, Netflix, February 23, 2018.

²² *Ratatouille*, movie, directed by Brad Bird and Jan Pinkava (Emeryville: Pixar Animation Studios, 2007).

to taste anew its familiar understanding of being church—recreated by marrying the tastes of traditional values of community with a flare of the present that comes from embracing the diverse *son mat* of the Other. This task requires all to recognize, acknowledge, identify, and see one another as vital and active participants in creating God’s community. Who can be better at navigating through change and the discomforts of change than those who experience it everyday—people who constantly have to re-imagine and rediscover who they are because they do not live in a place where they are the majority or the norm? This task also requires both “rearranging and reordering preexisting assumptions, exceptions, obstacles, placeholders, and prejudices” of the Other in order to create space for creativity and change to thrive. While it is important to acknowledge the loss many older Christians feel as they see the church changing, it is also important for those who remember the glory days to not hold on to the past too tightly, but instead create room for how the church can move forward today. As a second-generation daughter of immigrants, it is important for me to remember the taste of my parents’ bitter experience. It is equally important for my parents to not expect me to sustain and hold that bitter experience, but instead give room to re-create our cultural heritage that holds both essence from the homeland and essence from the new land.

Even though the church is doing ministry in a time much different than Christendom, the movement of change and readjusting the palate is not new. In the reformed tradition, churches today follow many leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox who uprooted theological and religious systems. In the DNA of the Presbyterian denomination is the phrase “the church reformed, always to be reformed

according to the Word of God.”²³ Over the past century, the Presbyterian church has embodied this continual change process: the union of the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and Presbyterian Church US in 1983; the ordaining of women as elders since 1930 and as ministers since 1956; the ordaining of LGBTQ+ in 2010; the change of definition of marriage in 2014; and the addition of the Belhar Confession in 2016. The Book of Order states that we are to balance adhering to the confessions of the church as well as the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

St. John’s church strives for this same balance of tradition and change. While the church exists in a city of entrepreneurs and cutting-edge technology, there is a deep appreciation from the congregation for the stained-glass windows, old wooden architecture, and historic pipe organ. Yet, there is acknowledgement and commitment to change as needed. Discernment on when to hold tradition or change depends on the needs—and the particular identity—of the community. As Presbyterians, being connectional is also in the DNA. St. John’s church does not do ministry alone, but in community with other Presbyterian congregations in the presbytery as well as the ecumenical²⁴ and interfaith neighbors.²⁵

Community and connectionality is not only a Presbyterian belief, but it is rooted in the greatest commandment: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.” (Matt 22:37, 39). To love God is to love the neighbor. The neighbor gives

²³ F-2.02, Book of Order 2017-2019: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II.

²⁴ Book of Order 2017-2019, G-5.0101.

²⁵ Book of Order 2017-2019, G-5.0102.

church clues on what needs to change and be upheld. The neighbor reminds the church that they are not to only serve themselves but their community. Karl Barth believes “it is the neighbor who breaks through the egocentricity of the self by his or her own concrete existence in fellow humanity that demands my conduct be such that the command of God is heard and obeyed.”²⁶ Therefore, “The church must always be a missionary community . . . the church must be an open circle, not a closed one.”²⁷

These are the adaptive challenges that St. John’s church faces as it fosters community. The church needs to keep tasting, adjusting the seasonings, experimenting with new flavors in order to create something that marries the flavors of the Greatest Commandment, honors the memory of what was passed down, and has the ability to rock the church to its core. St. John’s church needs to live into its baptismal identity of being a third place so that all lives that intersect may experience transformation from loss to hope, from loneliness to community, and from exile to belonging.

²⁶ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: Seabury, 1981), quoted in Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 143.

²⁷ Barth, *Ethics*, quoted in Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 145.

CHAPTER 2

PASTORAL AND CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

Theresa Cho: Personal and Pastoral Identity of a Korean American Clergywoman

Kevin Ford says, “When leading a church toward becoming missional, you must first understand who you are as a leader.”¹ The intersection between pastor and congregation is fluid and mutual. The church affects the pastor just as much as the pastor affects the church. The task of understanding myself as a leader begins not with St. John’s church, but with myself as a person and as a child of God. It begins both in the waters of baptism and in the waters of my childhood, both in my Korean family in an American context and in the church family in a Christendom context. Growing up in the church, I was aware how some considered my identity as a disqualification to be a pastor. As a Korean American, there are not many opportunities to serve a congregation other than Korean. As a Korean American woman, there are even fewer opportunities to serve a congregation whether Korean or non-Korean. Understanding myself as a leader does not begin with the assumption that I am a leader, but with overcoming the assumption that I am not a leader.

The challenge with identity is that a person does not occupy one singular identity. People cannot simply be limited to the categories of gender, class, race, and sexual

¹ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle location 1711.

orientation, but the intersections of all these identities. Just as my identity is not limited to a Korean American woman, it must also take into account social upbringing, education, gender, and sexual orientation. The identity of St. John's church also cannot be limited to an affluent mostly white congregation, but must include the diversity of faith, church experience, families, singles, social class, homeowner, renter, employed, unemployed, sexual orientation, gender, and more. Interaction between a church and pastor depends on the many individual intersections crossed.

Lidia Anchisi shares her struggle as a Korean adoptee stating, "I was part of a world I considered marginal, and at the margins of a world I considered my own."² I, too, waver between the center and the perimeter depending on the social circumstance. As a Korean American woman, my gender and race cannot be dichotomized. Instead they intersect one another in multiple ways. I am also a daughter of immigrant parents who have climbed the socio-economic ladder from poverty to working middle class. Through hard work and sweat, my parents embodied the American Dream that is often advertised, but rarely achieved. Finding space for these marginal identities to intersect as a pastor and a mother, an American and a Korean, and an evangelical and reformed has been integral in understanding who I am as a pastor and a leader.

The Intersection of Korean and American Identity

My identity as both American and Korean was the first intersection I encountered. The first time I crossed this intersection happened at the San Francisco International Airport at the age of seven. Growing up in the 1970s in Florida, Korea was not as widely

² Lidia Anchisi, "One, No One, and a Hundred Thousand: On Being a Korean Woman Adopted by European Parents," in *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, and Gender*, eds. Michele Tracy Berger and Kathleen Guidroz (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 295.

known compared to China. Even with the involvement of the United States in the Korean War in the 1950s, I was often called ‘chink’ and Chinese as a child. To many Americans, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese were all the same. Because my parents did not mention Korea at home, I believed as a young child that I was Chinese because that is what people called me at school, at the grocery store, and anywhere outside my home. My parents ensured that I grew up as American as possible. This desire for immigrant children to culturally adapt was not uncommon. Won Moo Hurh states there are four major areas of cultural adaptation among Korean immigrants: 1) English proficiency, 2) exposure to American mass media, 3) food habits, and 4) cultural values and social attitudes.³ Besides the food habits, I was successfully adapting to American culture. Then at seven, I came face to face with my conflicted identity as a Korean and an American when I met my older sister for the first time.

After my parents had married, my father had plans to study in the United States for a few years. My mother was pregnant with my older sister and had a choice to either go to the United States to be with my father or stay in Korea to take care of my sister. With limited financial resources, a newborn baby would have been a strain if my mother brought her along. A year and half later, my unexpected birth changed everything—leading my parents to begin settling down and creating a new life in the United States. My family’s story of separation is not unfamiliar to immigrant families who initially come to the United States with the expectation they will return to their homeland. However, I will never forget the first time I saw my sister who was eight years old at the time. She looked so Korean. She says I looked so American. She smelled Korean, dressed

³ Won Moo Hurh, *The Korean Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 71.

Korean, and spoke only Korean. I only spoke English. We were strangers, yet my mother told me we were sisters—taking both our hands and clasping them together.

My sister slowly acclimated to American culture and became proficient in the English language, but I did not want to have anything to do with her. Her Korean-ness embarrassed me. Her presence exposed my Korean identity when all I wanted to be was American. In my eyes, she could not assimilate fast enough. Everything changed when she arrived and I was having difficulty adapting. I was no longer an only child. I was a younger sister by birth but treated like the older sister who needed to take care of her newly arrived sibling. My parents were no longer around—having switched from a 9 to 5 job to a 12-hour a day/6 days a week dry cleaning business. I became a latchkey kid. I quickly learned how to live a double life: Korean at home and American at school.

Ruth Chung shares,

As I grew into adolescence and entered high school, the impact of being a minority and being different became more complex . . . At school, I was an outgoing, all-American teenager, but at home I was a good, quiet Korean girl who spoke Korean and ate Korean food. The shift from one to the other was immediate and automatic as soon as I opened the front door of my house. It was also largely unconscious.⁴

She further expresses,

As I shuttled back and forth between my two segregated worlds, trying to maintain a balance, I was painfully reminded that I resided in the crevice between two worlds, not fully belonging to either. The cost of complete belonging would be the surrender of one for the other. I knew I did not want to do this, nor could I. I realized that I had to create a new space, a unique place of my own, forged by selecting and integrating the best of both worlds. My awareness of this hybrid and hyphenated nature of my in-between existence left me with a profound sense of alienation and aloneness . . . Defining my ethnic identity is an ongoing process. I operate from two basic principles of balance and integration. I try to maintain a

⁴ Ruth Chung, “Reflections on a Korean American Journey,” in *Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Narratives by Asian American Professionals*, eds. Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1999), 60.

balance of my two worlds and to integrate what I deem to be the best of both.⁵

Many second-generation immigrant children come to terms with their identity by forming a new understanding of what it means to be Korean American. The following are examples of how Korean Americans are moving beyond labels and categories to identify themselves.

My identity is fluid, and that nothing can ever truly represent who I am. I am 1.5, sometimes 1.3 or 1.9, generation Korean American. The decimal fluctuates depending on my mood.⁶

I was a colored, queer, feminist, socialist, vegetarian, environmentalist, animal rights-advocating, abortion clinic-defending, meet-you-at-the-next-rally, march, protest, or whatever, button-wearing radical, militant activist.⁷

I got so tired of the labels: 1.5 generation Korean American gay man. Now I prefer to refer to myself as either an MBP (multiple-box person) or a PWI (person with issues.)⁸

As I grew older, I tried to find my place in this world, but it was not easy. In Korea, I was considered an American. I was a *gyopo* (기포) a person of Korean descent who lived outside of Korea. When called a *gyopo*, there is shame and judgment because many *gyopos* have lost connection to the Korean culture and language. In the United States, I was considered Korean. Questions like “Where are you from?” “Why is your English so good?” reminded me daily I did not belong. Sanders and Yarber define this as an example of microaggressions—“brief, everyday exchanges that send . . . subtle messages of hostility, degradation, or insult based on the target’s race, gender, sexual

⁵ Chung, “Reflections on a Korean American Journey,” in *Struggle for Ethnic Identity*, 61.

⁶ Elaine H. Kim and Eui-Young Yu, eds., *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 82.

⁷ Kim and Yu, *East to America*, 86.

⁸ Kim and Yu, *East to America*, 89.

orientation, gender identity, class, ability, ethnicity, national heritage, or religion.”⁹ As a *gyopo* and as a Korean American, the place I belonged was in-between. Chung says,

I call America home not because it is a perfect place, but because there is enough space and freedom here for me to define my own version of America—a Korean America, an Asian America. Although many people may still regard me as a stranger, and may continue to do so, my very presence is helping to reconceptualize what it means to be an American. I am contesting the narrowly defined notion that only white Americans are Americans, and striving to establish a new national identity that includes all those who have come and will yet come to its shores, regardless of race and skin color.¹⁰

I, too, had to carve out my own place of belonging and my own space that allowed me to push back and widen the definition of what it means to be an American.

The Intersection of First and Second-generation

If the intersection of being Korean and American is what I faced in the outside world, the intersection of first and second-generation is what I faced inside the home. At home it was a constant battlefield between my parents and I on whether or not I was behaving too American or not enough Korean. Deciphering my parent’s unsaid expectations of me was like treading through a minefield—never knowing when I was safe or about to be blown to bits. Most first generation parents prefer their second-generation children to rapidly assimilate into the American culture. However, they also expect their children to maintain Korean values within the home. Often these values counter each other and cause second-generation children to live in two different worlds. Outside the home, they value individualism, equality, freedom, self-assertion, and self-reliance. Inside the home, they honor filial piety, family interest over individual interest,

⁹ Sanders and Yarber, *Microaggressions in Ministry*, 12.

¹⁰ Chung, “Reflections on a Korean American Journey,” in *East to America*, 68.

negative attitudes on intermarriage, and conservative gender ideology.¹¹ Hurh points out when it comes to cultural assimilation, second-generation can be considered 100 percent American. “They speak impeccable English, many of them are bilingual, and some do not even speak Korean. Many prefer American food to Korean food and have never been to Korea. Most of them have American first names. However, being caught between two cultures, young Korean Americans often face problems of existential ambivalence and identity.”¹²

Maxine Hong Kingston describes assimilation for first generation immigrants as having “to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants build around our childhoods fits in solid America.”¹³ This process often involved observation of the world around us so that one can discern what was accepted and desirable. Assimilation is a creative process because one is in fact creating an alternate image of oneself. It is not necessarily a fake image, but a contained image. In school, I was more vocal and chatty, which would get me into trouble. Teachers would call my father in for a parent-teacher conference to tell him my behavior was too American compared to the other quieter Asian American students. Instead of getting into trouble, my father considered that as a sign of successful assimilation. I just thought I was being myself.

The generational tension mostly existed between my mother and I. Generational gaps are difficult, but generational gaps within a mother-daughter relationship are chiasmic and more complicated when you factor in our individual relationships with my

¹¹ Hurh, *The Korean Americans*, 73.

¹² Hurh, *The Korean Americans*, 81.

¹³ Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1976), Kindle locations 54-57.

sister. My mother's relationship with my sister was rooted in guilt for leaving her in Seoul in order to move to Florida. My relationship with my sister was steeped in misdirected anger for how much my life changed when she appeared. My relationship with my mother was rooted in her insecurity and envy.

Ophelia Hu Kinney expresses the mother-daughter relationship in Asian American cultures well when she says, "like mothers do, she'd had dreams of who I would be. And I had dreams of who she could be."¹⁴ The burden of carrying one another's dreams and expectations is paralyzing. My mother wanted all the possibilities and opportunities that America could offer me. However, she also wanted me to be able to hold all the pain of her sacrifices and redeem for her the worth of those sacrifices. The more I changed and acculturated, the more strained our relationship became.

When I was in college, the movie *The Joy Luck Club* came out in the theaters. The movie is about the relationships between four Chinese mothers and their Chinese American daughters. My favorite scene is when June is in the kitchen with her mother. They are cleaning up after a dinner party. June is clearly upset over something her mother said at the dinner party. Her mother would often compliment the other mothers' daughters at the expense of her own daughter, June.

June's mother looks over at her and asks, "Are you angry with me?" and June responds, "I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you. I'm sorry I'm such a terrible daughter." Surprised by her response, her mother says, "You are not a disappointment. All my hopes and dreams I put on you." June continues to say, "Every time you put your hopes and dreams on me, I feel like a failure because I cannot live up to them. I wish you

¹⁴ Ophelia Hu Kinney, "Witnessing and Seeing: A Mother-Daughter Story," *Inheritance*, May 5, 2018, <https://www.inheritancemag.com/stories/witnessing-and-seeing>.

would see me for me. Why can't you see me . . . me . . . the real me?" June's mother looks into her eyes, takes off her jade necklace that she always wore and begins to put it around June's neck. She gently affirms, "I do see you. I see you."¹⁵

This movie was the first time I felt as if someone was telling my story. It was as if someone had taken my inner thoughts and threw them up on the screen. This movie displayed my frustration, my fears, and my anger. My whole life I longed for my mother to see me. I longed for that moment June had with her mother where her mother finally saw her. I remember taking my mother to see this movie in order for her to hear what I have always been trying to say. I would be remiss if I did not admit I secretly hoped to re-enact the scene between June and her mother. During the movie, my mother and I laughed, cried, and bonded over the stories of the mothers and daughters. After the movie, I turned to my mother—anticipating what her reaction would be. I almost believed maybe she even had a jade necklace in her pocket to give to me. As my mother wiped away her tears and looked into my eyes, she took a deep breath and blurts out, "Do you see what those mothers went through for their daughters? Do you see how ungrateful the daughters were to their mother's sacrifice and suffering?" Just like that—my moment had passed.

My mother did speak some truth. As much as I wanted my mother to see me, I did not want to see my mother. When June's mother said, "I see you," what she was saying was "I acknowledge your existence. I know your frustration. I hear your anger." When my mother asked me to see her, she was asking me to say, "I taste your suffering. I feel your sacrificing love. I embody your hopes and dreams." As much as I desired my

¹⁵ *The Joy Luck Club*, movie, directed by Wayne Wang (Burbank: Hollywood Pictures, 1989).

mother to accept me and see the changes in me, my mother was asking me to recognize the changes she had already had to adapt and adjust.

Like myself, the church today already feels it has adapted and adjusted so much in order to be relevant, current, influential, and attractive to those outside and around the church—changing worship style, making the gospel message palatable, adding bells and whistles to the sanctuary, and experimenting with different ways to do church. However, these changes may go unnoticed to the very people the church is attempting to attract. The church is being asked whether it sees the frustrations, loneliness, hurt, and reality people are facing. It is not about technical changes, but transformational ones. Until that happens, the church will not be seen as agents of change—a third place where people are invited and accepted as they are. The church will remain outdated, irrelevant, and dying—except dressed up in new clothes with shiny new toys.

Hu Kinney describes her journey with her mother as she comes to grips with her daughter being gay. “I asked her, ‘Why don’t you believe the world can change?’ Because, I told her, I believe it can. But perhaps my mother didn’t disbelieve in the possibility of change as much as she feared it. She came to the United States from a changed and changing country, a Chinese province of restless revolutionaries, seeking peace. . . but I was born with her old-country soil still clenched in my fists.”¹⁶ In a simple six letter word, “change” can hold all the grief of past experiences when one’s world turns upside down as well as hold all the hopes of the future that nothing will change as one seeks peaceful beginnings for one’s children. The people of Israel in Jeremiah were that way. The church is that way. My parents are no different. All hold nostalgia as they

¹⁶ Hu Kinney, “Witnessing and Seeing,” in *Inheritance*.

cling to the past and move towards the future. While nostalgia means “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past,” the origin of the word comes from the Greek word “nostos” and “algos.” “Nostos” means “return” and “home.” “Algos” means “pain.”¹⁷

This could be the reason why there is grief in the process of change. Change pokes at the pain of longing for what used to be. The people of Israel longed for the days when they had their own land and dreamt of a time when they could return with their children. The church longs for the days of vibrancy and abundance and dreams for the next generation to experience church in the same way. My parents longed for a time when they had a sense of belonging and acceptance and wished the same for my sister and me as they pushed us to assimilate and adjust to American culture. However, there is no returning home, at least for now. Now is the time to settle down, work, have a family, increase in number, and engage in the welfare of the city. Also, in doing the work, one may find that home is not what they remember or because the people have changed, there is no more a sense of belonging that existed before.

With this sentiment, Hu Kinney shares,

I had [my mom’s] name, which means “peaceful waves”, inked on the back of my right ankle. “Are you sure?” asked my wife . . . but the tattoo was never supposed to be a sentimental gesture. Mama is my Achilles heel, and yet whatever I am stands on who she is and what she’s done. I am learning that reconciliation is possible not because we have done it, but because we are doing it.¹⁸

Just as “still waters” is imprinted in my children’s name from their great grandfather, my mother’s identity is imprinted in who I am.

¹⁷ Dictionary.com, accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.google.com/search?q=Dictionary#dobs=nostalgia>

¹⁸ Hu Kinney, “Witnessing and Seeing,” in *Inheritance*.

The Intersection of Gender and Theology

I do not recall being directly told that a woman could not be a pastor. There were many times I felt uplifted, encouraged, and praised as a leader in the church. Over time, I learned in subtle and subliminal ways that there was a limit to what would be accepted and expected of me if I wanted to continue to serve the church. When I was in college, I majored in chemistry and was on the pre-medicine track that my father hoped for. I was also a leader at the local InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapter, a youth director at the Korean Presbyterian Church and in the worship band at the local Vineyard church. College was a place where I could be who my father wanted me to be as well as do what I felt passionate to do. I did not have to choose between my parent's dream and my dream. That would not last long. It is not possible to maintain a foot in both places. Eventually I had to choose what direction to go. I either change my life or change my parents.

My grades began to fall as my interest in chemistry waned. When I informed my father I did not want to be a doctor and I wanted to attend seminary, my father did not speak to me for months. My mother labeled me a betrayer of dreams and all the sacrifices they made living in the United States. As I pursued options for leadership in ministry, I experienced discouragement and opposition at my church and the local InterVarsity chapter because they believed women should not be in leadership. The biblical and cultural evidence on why women should not be leaders was overwhelming. At every turn, I was given a Rolodex of Bible verses and the five relationships of Confucianism. While the lack of support from my family and peers was difficult, the lack of confidence I had in my own sense of self and call was more difficult. The dream to be a pastor waned as

well. It was not until years later that it was awoken again by an unlikely person, my father.

I do not know what made me believe that a woman could be a pastor. I had never seen one before. They were as mysterious and rare as a unicorn sighting. I was twenty-four years old before I laid eyes on a woman pastor and she was Korean American as well. I encountered actual tangible evidence to show my parents it was possible and her name was Rev. Mary Paik. God indeed works in mysterious ways. Just as I had my first woman pastor sighting, my father was contemplating being a pastor. Somehow my father and I were dreaming the same dream. In 1998, my father headed on Interstate 80 West towards Golden Gate Southern Baptist Seminary and I headed east to attend McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, where I encountered more unicorns.

My seminary life was filled with woman pastors of all shapes, colors, and sizes. They were “living water” to my very thirsty soul. They spoke to my experiences. They widened my theological lens on seeing God, the world, and myself. In 1998 at a Presbyterian retreat, these women of color who became my mentors rewrote John 4 from their experience as a racial ethnic female pastor.

And Jesus, tired from his Traveling Narrative, was sitting at the well. It was about noon.

A racial ethnic woman associate pastor came to draw water from the well, even though it had been dry of water for many months. It was out of hope, though, that she continued to come to this well. And Jesus, who saw her, said to her, "Give me a sermon," The racial ethnic woman associate pastor said to him, "How is it that you, a white man, ask a sermon of me, a racial ethnic woman?" Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a sermon,' you would have asked him and he would have given you a Living Sermon."

And the racial ethnic woman associate pastor said to him, "Where would you get that Living Sermon? Are you greater than our ancestor Calvin, who gave us our

theology and with his students taught it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who hears a sermon scraped together from dryness will never be filled. But those who listen to the Living Sermon will always be filled." The racial ethnic woman associate pastor said to him, "Give me this living Sermon for my well is dry." And Jesus asked her, "Why is it that your well is dry?" And she answered, "My well has been dry, because I am never given a well full of water. I am only given wells that nobody else wants, wells that are infested with rats, wells that are crumbling, wells that are covered with mold and moss, wells that I am sent to clean up. A well full of water is never mine."

And Jesus said, "How is it then that your well shall be filled?" And the racial ethnic woman associate pastor said, "Get my sisters to the well. Gather my sisters from east and west, and we shall crowd around the well. And together we will cry tears of anger, tears of oppression, tears of frustration, tears of aloneness. And we will mix with those tears of joy, tears of victory, tears of laughter, tears of faith. And we will fill that well with our tears. We will fill that well with our tears till it is dry no longer. And then in the warmth of the sun and the glow of the moon, we will once again see our reflections in the fullness of the well. We will gather around the well, and see our reflections, and smile. For again, we will see our beauty."

And Jesus wept.¹⁹

As a racial ethnic woman associate pastor, I have not had to scrape for a "living sermon," but it is because my well has been full from the tears of the women who went before me and those with me now. It is because of these women that I understood how much of my calling was not an individual one but one rooted in community. I tasted the tears of struggle, pain, hurt, and longing.

This struggle and pain became apparent and personal during the 2010 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) when I served as a commissioner, committee chairperson, and Vice Moderator candidate. At this assembly, I crossed many intersections of race, generation, and gender. There were six Korean American clergywomen commissioners. Two of the six were serving as committee chairpersons.

¹⁹ Lonna Chang-Ren Lee, Jeannie Yee, Arlene Gordon, Sarah Reyes-Gibbs, Mary Paik, Carrie Buckner, Clarice Martin, Laurene Chan, *Get the Sisters to the Well (John 4:6), A Parable inspired by Sisters sitting at the Well*, 1998.

Two of the six were Vice Moderator candidates. As Korean American clergywomen, we were quite proud of how far we had come. During a luncheon hosted by the National Korean Presbyterian Caucus, each pastor was invited to introduce himself, however all of the Korean American clergywomen were ignored.

An overture to create a non-geographic Korean language presbytery had been sent to the assembly for approval. Korean language presbyteries are often formed because Korean pastors do not feel they can fully participate in geographic presbyteries where English is the primary language. However, women and second-generation Korean American pastors and elders struggle to participate in Korean language presbyteries because they are often excluded due to gender and age. Because of these reasons, I along with two other Korean American clergywomen spoke on the assembly floor against the motion to approve the formation of another Korean-language presbytery. To our surprise, our three voices changed the vote and the motion was not approved.

As a second-generation Korean American woman, I often felt powerless. Yet at this specific moment, my voice was heard and I was affirmed by the body of the Presbyterian denomination. What I failed to recognize was the moment my identity shifted from a person with no power to a person with power. At the Korean luncheon, I was a second-generation woman with little power. However on the floor of the assembly, I was a respected clergy who knew Robert's Rules of Order and spoke English fluently. I knew how to work the motions. I knew how to present my argument.

This moment shed a light on how what I intended to be life-giving actions were life-taking for another. This moment was an intersection where my identity shifted from a second-generation Korean American who felt joy for speaking out and being heard to an

American-born young person who felt grief for knowing that my actions were at the expense of my parent's generation and their lack of ease with the English language; from a clergywoman who felt pride for being acknowledged as a voice that matters to a fellow Korean, a daughter of immigrant parents, who felt shame for participating in "airing the dirty laundry" in the midst of a mostly white denomination and betraying my people; and from a person with no power who felt empowered to know a few voices can change a vote to a person misunderstood when her actions are perceived as disobedience and disrespect.

Because of these identity and power shifts, my baptismal and pastoral identity must remain close within the intersection. I must create a safe space for me to heal, explore, and create so that I am capable of holding these shifting power dynamics within my identity—I am never fully victim or fully powerful. I am ever changing depending on my location, my surrounding, and the people I am with. I had to allow myself—the identity I was grasping—to fall apart and disintegrate. I had to find my voice that speaks from the in-between places. Rev. Marcia Mount Shoop says,

When I step into the pulpit each Sunday, I take up space there with all these intersections of power and identity in the church and in our world. I am not a victim in the pulpit, but I am a survivor. I am not a disembodied person; I am a woman with battle scars and years of healing work under my belt. When I wear a robe, it is not just because of John Calvin's contention that teaching elders wear academic regalia; it is to help protect me from the gaze of those who scrutinize my dress and my appearance. I am not a free agent, I am serving a God who calls me to preach about healing and justice and freedom and joy. And that call invites me to embody the good news I have known as a woman whose life has been saved by Jesus.²⁰

²⁰ Marcia Mount Shoop, "The Pulpit as Intersectional Space: Jesus' Good News," *Peace-ing Together* (blog), September 5, 2017, <http://marciamountshoop.com/blog/pulpit-intersectional-space-jesus-good-news/>.

St. John's Presbyterian Church: Church Identity of a Small Urban Congregation

St. John's Presbyterian Church was also born alongside the water. St. John's church currently sits on the corner of Lake and Arguello Streets, which is adjacent to a public school, a hospital, a senior care facility, the Presidio, and three main streets where many restaurants and businesses are located. Everyday many families and people pass by St. John's church on their way to work, school, or running errands. The church is also located across the street from one of the largest and oldest synagogues in California, Congregation Emanu-El. While the neighborhood is mostly white and upper middle class, it still has evidence of its historical beginnings. Two blocks away is Clement Street known as second Chinatown and the Russian Orthodox Church. In the midst of houses that cost millions of dollars, St. John's church hands out supplemental groceries on Saturday mornings to Mandarin, Cantonese, and Russian-speaking neighbors. However, St. John's church did not always reside in the same neighborhood—having moved three times in its 147 years of existence.

In the Beginning: the DNA of St. John's church

St. John's church formally organized on March 6, 1870 with sixty-one charter members: thirty-seven from Calvary Presbyterian Church, fifteen from Central, and five from First Presbyterian Church. The founding pastor of St. John's church was Dr. William Anderson Scott who also founded Calvary Presbyterian Church. Previously Dr. Scott was kicked out of Calvary when charges were brought against him for his views on the Civil War. "In a word, I was in favor of the Union with the Constitution and equal rights. If this could not be, then I was for a peaceful separation like that of Abraham and Lot. The war I regard as unjustifiable and wicked, and ruinous to the Federal states. The

South cannot be subjugated, and a reunion now is neither desirable nor possible. Such views were very unpopular in San Francisco in the Fall of 1861 and because Dr. Scott opposed what he called ‘Mr. Lincoln’s war’ he could no longer remain at Calvary.”²¹ After some time, he was asked to return to begin a new church, St. John’s Presbyterian Church.

The first service was held on March 27, 1870 at what is now known as Union Square. During Dr. Scott’s time, the membership grew steadily. Dr. Scott and St. John’s church also organized efforts to start San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, located north of San Francisco. Dr. Scott served as the first president of the board of the faculty of San Francisco Theological Seminary.

After Dr. Scott’s tenure, membership dropped to half. Between 1879 and 1887, the membership dropped from 382 to under 200. It is not clear why the membership dropped. Whether it was due to the founding pastor leaving or the location of the church, in 1887, the church decided to move to Octavia and California Streets near the apex of the cable car transportation site. The church went into debt to take a gamble on moving to another location. They hoped to capitalize on the growth happening towards the western part of the city. On May 8, 1889, the first services were held. In 1890, membership was only 160 and in 1895 less than one hundred. This decline in numbers continued until 1902 when only forty were on the membership rolls. One possible factor was the decline in leadership. Between 1890-1899, St. John’s church went through five pastors plus various pulpit supplies.

Calvary Presbyterian Church enters into the life of St. John’s church once again by paying off their debt and the mortgage in exchange for sharing space with them until

²¹ Archival notes found in St. John’s library.

they found a new location. When the new Calvary church building was completed, there was an urge to possibly merge and close St. John's church forever.

A layman, Arthur W. Foster, Dr. William Scott's son-in-law, however, objected the merger, recalling the words of Dr. Scott that "one day there will not be so much as a vacant square foot of land on the San Francisco peninsula, and thus, it is folly to advocate a reduction in the number of churches, rather we should be building throughout the City until every neighborhood is served."²² With this in mind, he urged them to remember their "rich tradition to be daring and confident" and therefore made a proposition to the remaining members. He challenged that "if fifty people will give positive leadership, see out a new site for the church, and move, I will pay off all debts, buy the needed land, build a church as beautiful as the one I remember so well a quarter century ago, and guarantee the pastor's salary. All I ask is that at each annual meeting of the church, the treasurer is able to report the church is debt-free and the congregation addresses itself to the future with optimism, dedication, and confidence, whatever may be the circumstances of the Church, the City, or the World."²³

On Easter of 1906, the first service was held after the completion of the church building on Lake and Arguello Streets. In many ways, Dr. Scott was correct. Every square foot of land in the Richmond district is filled with homes, businesses, schools, and worshipping centers. Flocks of people, families, and children walk by the church every day on their way to work, school, or on their way home.

²² Roger J. Deas, *A Condensed History of the First 100 Years of St. John's Presbyterian Church in San Francisco* (San Francisco: St. John's Presbyterian Church, 1971), 13.

²³ Deas, *A Condensed History of the First 100 Years of St. John's*, 14.

DNA is the carrier of our genetic information—information that makes us who we are as individual human beings. The relationship with God and God’s people carry the DNA of communal identity and being created in God’s image. The church as well has DNA—a code that defines its identity and personality. Kevin Ford says a church that has a clear sense of identity is in congruence with what they say and what they do.²⁴ Discovering a church’s DNA is the first task of any transforming church.

The genetic code of St. John’s church can be found in the founder, Dr. William Scott’s son-in-law, Arthur W. Foster’s words. At its core, the church is to live with confidence and a willingness to risk. Just like my parents who took a risk to move to another country based on their hopes and dreams for a brighter future, the confidence and willingness to risk gave St. John’s church the ability to change locations and venture out into a new and undeveloped neighborhood; to say ‘no’ to merging with Calvary Presbyterian Church when it was deplete of finances; and to believe in themselves that St. John’s had a vibrant future if the members were willing to put in the hard work. This is also congruent with its Presbyterian Church (USA) genetic code of “reformed and always reforming.” Not to mention that San Francisco is a hub for entrepreneurs and a technological culture that requires us to constantly update our apps so that we stay current with the changes as well as correct past kinks and errors.

St. John’s church must also explore whether a part of their DNA includes Dr. Scott’s views on the Civil War—naming it “unjustifiable and wicked” instead of a just cause for the emancipation of slaves. For Dr. Scott, protecting the system and the well being of the Federal States was more important than eliminating the slavery at all costs. While Calvary ousted Dr. Scott, St. John’s church brought him back.

²⁴ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle location 199.

The Heydays of the 1950-60s

With the building boom attracting many young families to the Richmond District, St. John's church benefitted with steady growth in membership. By 1926, membership had reached 455, the highest since 1879. St. John's church continued to grow until 1960. Membership rose to over 700 during the stock market crash, the Great Depression, World War II, Pearl Harbor, Atomic Bombing on Hiroshima, and Korean War. Given the time and the increasing needs of families living in the nearby naval base, St. John's church became a programmatic church—providing food and job referrals for the unemployed, social programs for soldiers and their families, and vacation Bible schools.

Rev. Lloyd Carrick was the pastor during 1927-1960—the most prosperous time for St. John's church. Rev. Carrick says that he can divide his ministry time into three parts: eleven years before the war, the war years, and after the war. Rev. Carrick began his ministry during the Depression. In 1928, *The Church Messenger* listed many names of people in the congregation who needed jobs—as many as thirty names were listed in each issue. A local restaurant on Clement Street would feed hundreds of unemployed people and St. John's church sent many families to that restaurant. Most of Rev. Carrick's salary was paid in nickels and dimes collected from the offering plates.

Towards the end of the Depression, evangelism became the main focus. During that time, the George Wood Anderson Revival Meetings were the prime evangelism tool. In 1932, all the San Francisco district churches participated in hosting one. However, these meetings never drew new members or converts to the churches. In San Francisco, this method did not seem to work. Around the same time, Earl Kernahan developed a religious survey requiring churches to visit homes in the neighborhood with families that

had a Protestant background but were not active in the church. St. John's church did this for four consecutive nights and on that Palm Sunday in 1933 115 joined the church— fifty-two of them being twenty-one years old and under. Rev. Carrick had found his method of evangelism. By the seventy-fifth anniversary, St. John's church was experiencing major growing pains.

During his years at St. John's church, Rev. Carrick meticulously tracked the numbers of each group, worship attendance, and outreach programs. In a report where Rev. Carrick reflects back on his ministry, he says, "Early in my ministry, I developed my own system of church records. Being a printer and having my own press this came naturally. . . by now, in the 'computer age,' I suppose there are many even better systems. But I did feel I was pioneering a bit in this field in my day."²⁵

During the war days, this boom in numbers would slow down as one young man after another were pulled into military service. *The Church Messenger* at that time was filled with war news and references to persecutions of Jews and Christians in Germany. The focus of St. John's church switched to providing programming and pastoral care to the military families located at the naval base in the nearby Presidio district.

After the war, the Richmond and Presidio district became a good area for young married couples to live and raise a family. Rent was reasonable and plenty of housing available. However as young families became more affluent and rent in the city kept rising, they moved south to the Peninsula or north to Marin County to buy their own homes. Slowly, San Francisco lost young families to newer subdivisions outside of San Francisco and a number of schools began to close in the city.

²⁵ Archival notes found in St. John's library.

In the Red: Decline of Membership and Finances

In 1968, St. John's church took a turn and membership decreased to 225; ninety-six in 1979 and seventy-three in 1987. It seemed as though St. John's church was repeating its early years on Octavia and California. As membership and financial resources declined, the church became more independent on income from building use from outside groups renting space.

Rev. David White became the pastor during this time. In the church newsletter, *Provoke*, Rev. White writes a "Pastor's Report to the Congregation," sharing some of his first impressions while he is in the honeymoon period of his ministry. Rev. White's blunt and direct words exposes the reality St. John's church was facing.

I have observed a strain of almost adolescent self-centeredness. A few people in this parish act like babies who want to be coddled. Collectively, this attitude expresses itself in a point of view that the program and ministry of our church should be concerned solely with St. John's and its members, and should not reach outside to those beyond us . . . The source of this pessimism may be related to the uncertainty of our times, or to changes in the world and in the church . . . [change] is a process which does not make demands upon you and the parish only. It makes demands upon me. It is very hard for me to change, just as it is hard for you. There are many new things that I have had to learn, many new experiences that I have had to develop, and many new patterns I must inaugurate. I just want you to know that we are all in the same boat.²⁶

Much of Rev. White's ministry was making technical changes such as changing worship times and Sunday School to creating new programming to draw new people to the church. St. John's church even hired seminary assistants and assistant pastors to reach out to younger people and the growing Chinese American population in the area.

However, none of these solutions could change the downward trend in membership.

²⁶ David White, "Pastor's Report to the Congregation," *Provoke* (San Francisco, St. John's Presbyterian Church, February 1969).

After Rev. White's tenure, the church put their energy in hiring a pastor that would redirect them to the "daring and confident" nature they once were charged by hiring a younger pastor with a young family. Rev. Robert Bennett's pastoral presence brought renewed energy and spirit that had been missing for many years. Young families seemed to feel it as well as the church began to grow. However, with disappointment Rev. Bennett only stayed fourteen months after his tenure was terminated through a Presbytery disciplinary action in 1990. He was charged with sexual misconduct and was removed from the church.

Not to be discouraged, St. John's church regrouped and hired Rev. John Anderson in 1991. When Rev. Anderson arrived, there were thirty people present in worship on a good day. This was a huge difference compared to the years of when there was more in the youth choir. One of the first things Rev. Anderson addressed was the lack of community. Even though they were small in number, people did not know each other and therefore, there was no common vision for the church.

A huge strength of St. John's church at the time were a handful of dedicated seniors who were willing to change and tired enough to not stand in the way of what needed to change. By the time Rev. Anderson arrived, there were not many left who were obstacles to change and doing things differently. The first thing the church tackled was their financial reality. By 1995, they were in debt and heavily dependent upon income that came from a day camp renting space. Session meetings were three to four hours long—solely dedicated to their financial crisis. Out of this crisis, St. John's church launched a financial campaign that was meagerly successful. The benefit of an old church is the opportunity to reach out to a variety of people whose family at one time had

connection to the church. Slowly, the budget was restored and an endowment was built. This was the turning point for the church. Financial freedom, stability, and relief gave room for hope to grow. Session meetings can now focus on planning, visioning, and dreaming.

After years of neglect and with some financial resources, the church began to set goals on improving the actual building of the church, knowing visitors judge by what they see and how it makes them feel. A dilapidated church does not make a good impression unless the ministry and identity of the church supports the unique look of the building, such as worshipping in a warehouse or home. These improvements were incremental and small. It started with painting the church, updating the sign, and ripping out the old carpet.

In 1999, worship attendance began to increase. San Francisco was experiencing a growth from the dot com industry. Rev. Anderson also began attending conferences and applied what he learned to his ministry. He began to set up a series of programs that were unsuccessful. He hired a series of part-time youth leaders, but it was difficult to find qualified and dedicated people. He tried tracking the changes of worship attendance, hoping to capture a glimpse of reasoning behind the fluctuations. He found none of these best practices effective.

These trials and errors led to an epiphany, which became Rev. Anderson's mantra of ministry: "It is not up to me. It is not my task. It is God's." He stopped obsessing over worship attendance. He let go of looking for the next big thing or cool idea. He gave up trying to control what he ultimately could not control.

In 2000, Rev. Anderson began a Doctor of Ministry program. This gave him the idea to hire an associate pastor. He was looking for someone who would be free to dream, execute changes, and help St. John's church live out their vision. This was quite a venture to convince the elders to undertake. They would have to tap into the DNA of St. John's church and find the confidence and willingness to risk. It is unusual for a 130-member church to have two full-time pastors. Three years later, I was hired as the associate pastor.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

FIRE 불 (BUL)

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Intersectionality and Identity

The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, and Gender by Michele Tracy Berger and Kathleen Guidroz

The Intersectional Approach is a collection of essays that address the work of intersectionality in theory, method, and praxis. Where race, class, and gender were once treated as separate issues, intersectionality recognizes how the intersection of these issues is integral to a person's place in society. Simply put, intersectionality is "individual and collective narratives that answer the question "Who am/are I/we?"¹ Berger and Guidroz refer to this as the "race-class-gender matrix, the intersectional paradigm, interlocking systems of oppression, multiple axes of inequality, the intersection, and intersectionality."² The work of intersectionality has its roots in the feminist movement, where intersections of class and race began exposing issues of power within the feminist movement.

With essays such as "Black Women and the Development of Intersectional Health Policy in Brazil," "The View from the Country Club: Wealthy Whites and the Matrix of

¹ Berger and Guidroz, *The Intersectional Approach*, 48.

² Berger and Guidroz, *The Intersectional Approach*, 1.

Privilege,” and “One, No One, and a Hundred Thousand: On Being a Korean Woman Adopted by European Parents,” *The Intersectional Approach* aims to expose interrelatedness by seeking commonalities that are not defined in “sameness but as intertwined difference and possible points of connection.”³ These essays make space for what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as “an unmapped common ground.”⁴ Moving forward in this unmapped journey requires courage to step out in faith as people encounter one another; openness as people engage in conversations and discover what commonalities exist; and curiosity to not hold too tight to those commonalities, but willingly explore each other’s perspectives and experiences.

Vivian May states that our individual identities live within structural systems and sites of marginalizations, and forms of power. Because individuals exist in a race-class-gender matrix, the façade that individuals attain a certain general understanding of who an individual is given their categorical identity must be let go. “The matrix philosophy . . . focuses on simultaneity, attends to within-group differences, and rejects ‘single-axis’ categories that falsely universalize the experiences or needs of a select few as representative of all group members.”⁵ First, all persons participate in positions of power and privilege, but may not all do so at once. Privilege and oppression occur simultaneously.⁶ Secondly, a more pluralistic approach is needed in order to recognize and accept the objective differences in one other by forging “commonalities without assuming that their experiences, histories, ideas, or traits are identical with those of

³ Berger and Guidroz, *The Intersectional Approach*, 93.

⁴ Berger and Guidroz, *The Intersectional Approach*, 93.

⁵ Vivian M. May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 22.

⁶ May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*, 23.

others.⁷ May makes a distinction between “commonalities” and “sameness.”

“Commonalities indicates complex points of connection that both incorporate and move beyond sameness, similarity, and difference; commonalities acknowledge and contain difference.⁸

Intersectionality is not only about intersections of identity, but exposes the myths that people have about the Other and their experiences as well as ways individuals participate in systemic oppressive structures by not recognizing one another’s differences. Intersectionality is different for people of color and for white people.

“Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group . . . tries to navigate the main crossing in the city . . . the main highway is ‘racism road.’ One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street . . . She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression.”⁹ May describes it in this manner, “Everyone has intersecting identities and all of us live within interlocking structure of raced and gendered social stratification. Everyone ‘has’ race and gender, though only Black women are perceived by the courts as embodying ‘both.’ White women’s gender comes to the fore while their race falls from view as transparent, making them seem, from single-axis thinking, ideal representatives or case examples of sexism: their intersectionality is denied.”¹⁰

⁷ May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*, 85.

⁸ May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*, 85.

⁹ Berger and Guidroz, *The Intersectional Approach*, 48.

¹⁰ May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*, 25.

Both May and Berger and Guidroz suggest listening with raw openness. This requires vulnerability and the willingness to risk being wounded. “Listening with raw openness demands intellectual humility—the willingness to embrace uncertainty, contradiction, and limitation, coupled with the willingness to self-reflect.”¹¹ Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow call this adaptive leadership. They suggest that adaptive leadership involves two processes: diagnosis and action. The diagnosis and action involve both the social system one is operating in and oneself.¹² Only when people let go of old worldviews and step out in faith to create a world envisioned, can change take place. As people change, people “rethink our narrative of difference . . . disrupting a dialectics of duality such as inside/outside, center/margin, and us/them, for it affords them the possibility of inhabiting the borderlands located at the intersections of categories.”¹³

Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality by Gloria Anzaldúa

Gloria Anzaldúa defines intersectionality as an acknowledgment that people’s identities inhabit different cultures and therefore shift into and out of perspectives corresponding to those cultures.¹⁴ Identities also comprise of past and present selves as well as the light and shadow sides. Anzaldúa says it is like walking around in “a glass-boxed past”:

I wonder who I used to be (the chicanita del rancho totally immersed in mexicano culture), I wonder who I am now (living in a California beach town known as paradise). My identity keeps constantly shifting - being Chicana or queer or writer is not enough. I’m more mestiza than any particular identity. The border artist

¹¹ Berger and Guidroz, *The Intersectional Approach*, 93.

¹² Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Kindle locations 258-261.

¹³ Berger and Guidroz, *The Intersectional Approach*, 296.

¹⁴ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 3.

constantly reinvents her/himself. Through art, s/he is able to reread, reinterpret, re-envision, and reconstruct her/his culture's present, as well as its past.¹⁵

She further describes identity as holding conflicting categories and being relational and multi-layered—meaning it changes depending who one is with and the surroundings one interacts with. Therefore, personal identity is related to communal identity.

With the complex nature of understanding identity and how they intersect personally as well as communally, a re-imagining of one's identity in new ways requires “that we change the focus of the lens trained on our faces and shift our perceptions.”¹⁶ This shifting requires a letting go of “old identifications and behaviors” and undergoing constant disintegration and reconstruction. Anzaldúa names this shifting process “the Coyolxauhqui imperative: a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the *sustos* resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation *que hechan pedazos nuestras almas*, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us.”¹⁷ In other words, in order to heal and see oneself wholly, one must call back the pieces of oneself that have been dispersed, lost, or continue to haunt us.

Sometimes the shadow blocks this process and rules my behavior, making the process painful. I cannot use the old critical language to describe, address, or contain the new subjectivities. Using primary methods of presentation (*autohistoria*) rather than secondary methods (interpreting other people's conceptions), I reflect on the psychological/mythological aspects of my own expression. I scrutinize my wounds, touch the scars, map the nature of my conflicts, croon to *las musas* (the muses) that I coax to inspire me, crawl into the shapes the shadow takes, and try to speak with them.¹⁸

¹⁵ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 61.

¹⁶ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 74.

¹⁷ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 1.

¹⁸ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 4.

In *Thriving through Ministry Conflict*, these shadows are identified as the red zone, where behavior stems from issues of survival, acceptance, control, and competence of what is known about one's own identity.¹⁹

These shadows can happen from outside forces and inside forces. For people on the margins, stripped of history, language, identity, and integrity, intersectionality is contending with those outside forces that force their perceptions, identities, and definitions upon others. Anzaldúa describes her identity as:

My body is sexed; I can't avoid that reality, although I could change it through transgenering or transsexing. My body is raced; I can't escape that reality, can't control how other people perceive me, can't de-race, e-race my body, or the reality of its raced-ness. U.S. society is gendered and racialized; it expects certain behavior from women, certain bearings from men, certain comportment from queer mujeres, certain demeanor from queer hombres, certain conduct from disabled, and so on. If you're a person of color, those expectations take on more pronounced nuances due to the traumas of racism and colonization. Though there are aspects of gender, sexual, and racial identity that no single person can change, together we can alter cultural beliefs, behaviors, attitudes about their meanings. These identity categories—categories based primarily on history, biology, nationality - are important aspects of personal and collective identity; however, they don't contain our entirety, and we can't base our whole *identidad* on them. It's not "race," gender, class, or any single attribute but the interaction of all of these aspects (as well as others) that creates identity.²⁰

The inside forces can be just as influential in our understanding of one's identity. One must be healed from one's own ego in order to recognize places where power is exerted and possessed. Anzaldúa says that healing occurs in the disintegration of one's own ego. Healing is about being dismembered and pulled apart so that healing images are brought back, resulting in a change of attitude and a shift in one's perspective.²¹ These

¹⁹ James P. Osterhaus, Joseph M. Jurkowski, Todd A. Hahn, *Thriving through Ministry Conflict: A Parable on How Resistance Can Be Your Ally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 106.

²⁰ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 69.

²¹ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 29.

healing changes lead to a grieving process where blame, anger, and bargaining move to living into a life with new meaning: “Our shadow aspects reveal themselves in caustic and cutting ways, exposing unfulfilled wishes and repressed feelings. Despite living in close proximity to each other at home, school, and work, despite living in overlapping worlds, unconscious forces and unspoken desires divide us.”²² Only when fears are faced about oneself and places where power is held exposed, can one’s self-imposed prison be broken. Anzaldúa recognizes within herself that she is marginalized by race, gender, and sexuality. However, she is also privileged, being able to speak many different languages, having higher education, and a large speaking platform.²³

Our identity must reside in a place that Anzaldúa calls *nepantla*, a creative space where transformation and healing can take place. It is an “in-between” place, a place where we detach and attach ourselves to each of our several cultures.²⁴ Out of *nepantla*, a new identity is formed called *mestizas*. This new identity requires a creative process that forms a chaotic void where new category of identity is formed.

Negotiating with borders results in *mestizaje*, the new hybrid, the new *mestiza*, a new category of identity. *Mestizas* live in between different worlds, in *nepantla*. We are forced (or choose) to live in categories that defy binaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Living in intersections, in cusps, we must constantly operate in a negotiation mode. *Mestizas* don’t fit with the norm. Depending on the degree of cultural hybridization, we are caught between cultures and can simultaneously be insiders, outsiders, and other-siders.²⁵

²² Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 79.

²³ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 4.

²⁴ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 57.

²⁵ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 71.

In this *nepantla* place, the missing pieces of identity that have been taken away, lost, or stolen can be summoned back in order for transformation and healing to take place and wholeness is attainable.²⁶

Intersectionality work is important when doing identity work; identifying competing identities; and forming a new understanding of self. Intersectionality work gives a framework for communal identity work as intersectional persons intersect with other intersectional persons. When these intersections happen at churches, people find connection among the commonalities they have with others. However, it is important to not attach the meaning of commonality with the expectation that everyone is required to be the same or willing to adapt to be the same. When churches express that they are welcoming, hospitality must move beyond appreciating the sameness of one another and move toward the capacity to contain difference while acknowledging intersections of commonality. Where intersections of identity intersect is where myths of how hospitable and welcoming a church is as well as ways the church is systemically upholding unwelcoming behavior is exposed. This requires listening with rawness and humility of the Other that will lead to needed self-reflection and ability to hold uncertainty of one's changing identity. Together with the Other, the church can rethink the church's narrative of difference as something positive, multi-layered, and holding conflicting categories of identity.

For St. John's church, depending on who is the pastor, who is sitting in the pews, and who is in the surrounding neighborhood, the identity of St. John's church is constantly be reformed, re-imagined, and reshaped according to the many personal

²⁶ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 3.

identities intersected. Therefore, personal identity is connected to communal identity. My pastoral identity work is mutually connected to the identity work of St. John's church.

Personal Identity as Third Space, the In-Between Space Where Multiple Identities Intersect

Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology by Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Sueng Ai Yang

Off the Menu uses food metaphor as a way to define identity for Asian Americans and raise questions about cultural authenticity in today's world; questions such as "Who is the insider and who is the outsider within a given culture?" "Are Asians more 'authentically' Asian than Asian North Americans? Are second- or third-generation Americans more authentically 'American' than first-generation immigrants? Are those adopted from Asia into Euro-American families more 'Asian' than third-generation Asian Americans or less Asian because their predominant family culture is Anglo?"²⁷ The identity of Asian Americans is complex because it takes into consideration the relationship Asian Americans have with the dominant white culture; the place it exists within the black and white binary framework; the generational divide among immigrants and children of immigrants; as well as contend with the diversity among the countries represented when lumped into one broad category of Asian Americans.

Essays such as "'She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn': Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority," "Cooking without Recipes: Interstitial Integrity," "Violence and Asian American Experience: From Abjection to *Jeong*," and "Re-creating Our Mother's Dishes: Asian and Asian North American Women's Pedagogy," reveal the complex nature of Asian American identity in the wider diasporas.

²⁷ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, xviii.

Although the dominant white culture views Asian women as stereotypically gentle, submissive, and forever foreign, Asian women share neither a common language nor a unifying culture. In fact, some of the Asian countries warred against one another just a generation ago, and Japan colonized both Korea and Taiwan in the first half of the twentieth century. Hindu culture in South Asia is radically different from the Confucian heritage in East Asia, the Muslim traditions in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries, and ethnic subgroups such as the Hmong. The Philippines shares a colonial history and culture more similar to that of Latin American than that of her Asian neighbors. While countries on the so-called Pacific Rim have developed phenomenally since the 1970s, many Asian people continue to live in abject poverty and suffer from malnutrition, poor sanitation, and the lack of safe drinking water. Just as there is no unified “Asia” but many “Asias,” depending on our interpretive frameworks and choices of focus, it is important to bear in mind that ideas of gender and the status of women vary from country to country and ethnicity to ethnicity.²⁸

Within one’s own culture, Asian Americans have struggled with definitions of authenticity, whether authentically American enough or authentically Asian enough. Many Asian Americans experience moments in their life when they have had to deny one culture over another in order to prove either how American or how Asian they are. Gale Yee shares, “When such traits of Chineseness become essentialized as visible hallmarks of authenticity, Chinese Americans are put in a double bind. As perpetual foreigners, they are tagged as not being American enough. Alternatively, they are expected to exhibit on demand their knowledge and culture of China, about which many, whose families have lived in the United States for generations, know little.”²⁹

Asian Americans also get lost or fall through the cracks in the United States when so much of the racial conversations and language center between the black and white binary. Latino/as and Arab Americans too are caught between finding a place in the discussions of racism and racial identity where so much is centered on white privilege

²⁸ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, xiv.

²⁹ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 48.

and racist sentiments towards the African American population. However for Asian Americans, racial identity plays out differently and cannot be seen through the same lens. “For African American the axis is color, white versus black. For Asian (and Latino/a and Arab) Americans it is citizenship, American versus foreigner.”³⁰

The biggest influential factor in Asian American identity is the model minority myth—which is to hold up Asian Americans as proof that it is possible to successfully assimilate into American society, contribute financially, and achieve the American dream.³¹ However, this myth is less of a compliment and more of a tool to denigrate other racial groups.

Asian Americans are held up as living proof that racial minorities can succeed in America, presumably by the sweat of their brow and not by civil rights demonstrations or protests. Using the model-minority stereotype as a weapon, whites tell blacks and Latino/as that “Asian Americans do not ‘whine’ about racial discrimination: they only try harder. The supposed accomplishments of Asian Americans divert attention away from the fact that racial discrimination is a structural feature of U.S. society, produced by centuries of systematic exclusion, exploitation, and disregard of racially defined minorities.”³²

In light of all these factors, *Off the Menu* offers a fresh framework to explore and define identity using the term “interstitial integrity.” “Interstitial integrity” recognizes that identity encompasses an integration of diverse parts, like “the way a collection of ingredients finally make a dish.” Rita Nakashima Brock says, “My identity resembles my mother’s eclectic meals, a fusion of ingredients annealed by the fires of growing up on three continents as a Japanese, mixed-race woman and a liberal Protestant educated in the

³⁰ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 46.

³¹ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 50.

³² Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 51.

second half of the twentieth century in U.S. schools.”³³ “Interstitial integrity” comprises of two components. One is “integrity” which requires self-awareness and self-acceptance of oneself and within the relationship of others. The other is “interstitial” which refers to something that lives within but remains distinct, such as the tissue that connects vital organs to one another.³⁴

“Interstitial integrity” is an identity defined in a system of layers: the poisons of racism, sexism, and colonialism;³⁵ the complex relationships with others that give language, emotions, and a lens to see ourselves and one another;³⁶ and the freedom to deny old self, claim new self, and create a hybrid of many cultures to form a multilayered self. “Interstitial integrity” ultimately acknowledges that all identity in the United States is a story of “race and immigration on North American soil” and therefore even the dominant white culture can expand their view on their own identity using this construct. “Whiteness is itself also a construct of racialized identity related to the history of Europeans in Europe and transplanted into an identity constructed by colonization and contact with Native Americans, enslaved Africans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. In the nineteenth century non-British immigrants, such as the poor from Ireland, had to prove their whiteness in court to gain naturalized citizenship.”³⁷ When the view of one’s own identity encompasses all the layers of complexity, then an honest conversation of how identities intersect in destructive and empowering ways can begin.

³³ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 126.

³⁴ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 126.

³⁵ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 139.

³⁶ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 136.

³⁷ Brock, Kim, Pui-Lan, and Yang, *Off the Menu*, 136.

Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology by Wonhee Anne Joh

“In-between,” “hyphenated,” and “neither/nor,” these words all describe the location of where marginalized people find themselves when defining their own identity. Wonhee Anne Joh puts forth a Christology from that marginalized place that is stripped of colonialism and a dominant cultural perspective. In order to do so, Joh explores the topic of identity because often one’s identity is tied into how they encounter Jesus Christ, the Living Word, and their own sense of understanding as a child of God. Joh explains her own identity as, “When I am there, I miss North America, and when I am here, I long for Korea. People living in the interstitial space between differing worlds often experience feelings of unsettledness, for one is ‘neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on the one level, and an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another.’”³⁸

Joh states that identity is not singular or simple, but is complex and multiple.³⁹ For marginalized people, identity exists at the boundaries and converges between dichotomized categories: “object/subject, Western/Eastern, female/male, creature/‘non’-creature, earth/cosmos, spirit/body, roots/routes, margin/center.”⁴⁰ Existing at the boundaries or in-between means the identity of marginalized people remains in the hyphen: Asian-American, Latin-American, African-American, or Arab-American. Hyphenated people are either depicted as “cultural scavengers and abandoners of

³⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xix.

³⁹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 1.

⁴⁰ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 2.

heritage” or “watchdogs who keep progressive Euro-American liberals from being too complacent and too comfortable with their ‘totalizing’ theories.”⁴¹ Brock describes the feeling of being a hyphenated person as “being torn among several different worlds that refuse to get along.”⁴²

The challenges with hyphenated people creating a sense of identity are two fold. One challenge is that cultural spaces are “unfixed, unsettled, porous, and hybrid.”⁴³ Because of the fluid nature of cultural spaces, they cannot be confined to definitive categories set by the dominant culture. The other challenge is “cultural identity is a ‘matter of becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’”⁴⁴ Within one’s identity holds the future and the various pasts, therefore, identities are rooted somewhere yet are in the process of transformation.

Hybridity and mimicry are two ways in which marginalized people can begin to reclaim and recreate identity beyond the hyphen. “Hybridity is something that emerges out of coerced assimilation or deculturation or is an identity misappropriated by the dominant group.”⁴⁵ Hybridity functions to offset authority and break away from binary thinking and established categories. Mimicry functions to resemble or liken the dominant culture and upset it as well. An example of mimicry being a resemblance is the self-deprecating term “Twinkie” used in an Asian American context to denote when a person

⁴¹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 9.

⁴² Rita Nakashima Brock, “Interstitial integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Woman’s Theology” in *Introduction to Christian Theology Today: Contemporary North American Perspectives*, ed. Roger A. Badham (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 183-95.

⁴³ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 51.

⁴⁴ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 52.

⁴⁵ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 53.

“looks” Asian, but identifies as white. Another example would be a similar derogatory term “Oreo” used by African Americans. However, at the heart of mimicry is to not resemble but to destabilize how the dominant culture perceives “sameness” and puts into questions what it means to be the same. “The consequence is very different from the intention of the colonizer in that mimicry produces subjects whose ‘not-quite sameness’ acts like a distorting mirror that fractures the identity of the colonizing subject.”⁴⁶

As a way to locate and situate identity in the Asian American experience, many theologians have created terms such as “interstitial cultural space” by Jan Mohamed or “Third Space” by Homi Bhabha.⁴⁷ Joh combines these two terms to create “interstitial Third Space.” “Interstitial Third Space” refers to the in-between place where identity is split apart, unsettled, erased, and broken down. The third space is the contact zone where God’s love allows life to flourish, create, and rediscover.⁴⁸ In the third space, identity does not have to choose between one category and the other. There is freedom to exist in-between or flow back and forth or embrace both. “The power of hybridity and the interstitial space is that the partial culture from which they emerge is unleashed to ‘construct visions of community, and visions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole.’”⁴⁹

Third space for churches hold the intersections and competing identities within individuals and community. It is not either/or but both/and as it provides permissive space to explore, recreate, erase, and form a new identity. Third space for churches is like

⁴⁶ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 55.

⁴⁷ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 59.

⁴⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 62.

⁴⁹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 62.

a home cooked dish created from memory that has the flavors of the homeland, but is constructed and presented in a way that reflects something fresh and new—representing both future transformation and rooted in various parts of the past. Churches are rooted in the life-giving attributes of their DNA and open to future transformations of how that DNA will be expressed. The in-between place of Christendom and post-Christendom is a good place for the church to be because it is where God’s love flourishes. The in-between place demands creativity and freedom to seek what it means to be a church of in-between people. Immersed in God’s love, the church can have the courage and joy to choose parts of their past identity that are affirming and let go of aspects that distort the love of God. The church no longer needs to feel burdened with past expectations of what it is to be church; but instead move forward to shape what it means to be church for today.

Church as Third Place – the In-Between Place Where Diverse People of Faith Intersect

The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of the Community by Ray Oldenburg

Ray Oldenburg defines three social spheres in a person’s life. The first place is home. The second place is the workplace. The third place is neutral ground such as coffee shops and bars, where “individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable.”⁵⁰ The American lifestyle has alienated people to just the first and second place. Without a third place to informally gather, tremendous pressure is placed on work and family life; “Domestic and

⁵⁰ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 22.

work relationships are pressed to supply all that is wanting and much that is missing in the constricted life-styles of those without community.”⁵¹

Oldenburg states that there has been a push for individuals to separate themselves from one another by moving into gated communities, larger homes, and suburban areas; “They proceed as though a house can substitute for a community if only it is spacious enough, entertaining enough, comfortable enough, splendid enough . . .”⁵² However, what is discovered is these places provide insufficient opportunity for community and often result in isolation and loneliness. “Our comings and goings are more restricted to the home and work settings, and those two spheres have become preemptive. Multitudes shuttle back and forth between the ‘womb’ and the ‘rat race’ in a constricted pattern of daily life that easily generates the familiar desire to ‘get away from it all.’”⁵³

There are seven characteristics of third place: 1) Neutral ground⁵⁴—No one plays host and all can participate at their comfort level; 2) Leveler⁵⁵—There is no formal membership process or vetting criteria. Everyone has access and is included; 3) Storytelling⁵⁶—The main activity is casual conversation. Storytelling can be a cure to boredom, loneliness and the pressures of the day; 4) The people⁵⁷—The regulars give third places character. Newcomers bring new ideas and expand possibilities. Regulars

⁵¹ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 9.

⁵² Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 587.

⁵³ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 625.

⁵⁴ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 22.

⁵⁵ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 24.

⁵⁶ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 32.

⁵⁷ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 33.

should remember they were once newcomers; 5) Low-profile⁵⁸—Third places are ordinary and casual. They are not the “in” place to hang out. “The best attitude toward the third place is that it merely be an expected part of life—“an incorporation into the everyday stream of existence;”⁵⁹ 6) Playful⁶⁰—People have the freedom to engage in a playful spirit, whether a group activity or just conversation. There is a sense of magic in the air as people engage in laughter and are filled with joy; 7) Home away from home⁶¹—This is not to imply that third place replaces the first place. Rather, third place is what the home is not, yet there is “at-homeness” comfort and warmth. “Those who claim a third place typically refer to it in the first person possessive”—“our hangout.”⁶²

Informal public gatherings are vital to not only the individual’s well-being, but to the neighborhood as well. Oldenburg says that informal public gathering areas in the neighborhood are vital in order to nurture the values of inclusivity and locality. A neighborhood thrives when it integrates newcomers and provides opportunities of engagement so that skills and talents are shared for the betterment of community life.⁶³ This inclusive nature of acceptance serves to expand possibilities.⁶⁴

Places such as these, which serve virtually everybody, soon create an environment in which everybody knows just about everybody. In most cases, it cannot be said that everyone, or even a majority, will like everybody else. It is, however,

⁵⁸ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 37.

⁵⁹ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 37.

⁶⁰ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 38.

⁶¹ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 39.

⁶² Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 40.

⁶³ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 263.

⁶⁴ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 897.

important to know everyone, to know how they variously add to and subtract from the general welfare; to know what they can contribute in the face of various problems or crises, and to learn to be at ease with everyone in the neighborhood irrespective of how one feels about them.⁶⁵

Third places also sorts people according to interests and potential usefulness⁶⁶ and creates a sense of belonging.⁶⁷

Third places ultimately function as “ports of entry”⁶⁸ where diverse individuals can intersect and expand their sense of community. As human beings, we were designed to be in community with one another and not isolated into silos. As our world becomes more technologically connected, Oldenburg still states the importance of face-to-face casual interactions so that our neighborhoods and we as individuals can thrive.

Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great by Kevin G. Ford

Kevin Ford describes the essence of the transforming church when he says, “This is a book about the transforming church, and it describes a journey that takes years.”⁶⁹ The reason why it takes years is because change is rarely readily embraced by the congregation.⁷⁰ A by-product of change is pain. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts and no “magic pill” to bypass the needed changes a church needs in order to be healthy.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 246.

⁶⁶ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 274.

⁶⁷ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 368.

⁶⁸ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 254.

⁶⁹ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle location 26.

⁷⁰ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 143.

⁷¹ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 171.

Ford iterates that “we live in an age where change has become the only certainty.”⁷² The problem is most pastors will admit they lack change-leadership skills to lead change in the midst of a change-resistant subculture.⁷³

Ford identifies the prognosis of the church and serves up a prescription that is direct and blunt. The church needs to change or it will die. Therefore, the majority of this book is about the process of change. The diagnosis of the church is its adaptation to consumerism. While the church desires to change the worldly culture, it transforms itself to the very culture it is trying to conform. Ford asks, “How can we engage the culture without being co-opted? What would it look like to actually transform our culture rather than to simply talk about it? And what exactly constitutes meaningful change anyway?”⁷⁴

Ford states that churches need to acknowledge and address the following indicators and continuums to move towards transformation: consumerism and community, incongruence and code, autocracy and shared leadership, cloister and missional, and inertia and reinventions. These indicators are helpful tools to expose parts of the church that exhibit unhealthy patterns and behaviors. The continuums give a path towards health by highlighting what needs to be aligned and adjusted.

A part of the church’s dysfunction is the cycle that perpetuates toxicity amongst church members. As an example, Ford shares a behavioral experiment done on monkeys, using bananas. The parallels Ford makes with this experiment is how veteran church members carry on subliminal messages regarding what is allowed and possible and what is not. Breaking this cycle is imperative to move an unhealthy church to a healthy one.

⁷² Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 117.

⁷³ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 147.

⁷⁴ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle locations 187-188.

Five building blocks essential to building community in a healthy church are: mentor mission partners, inviting input, creating a structure for assimilation, developing small groups, and building third places.⁷⁵ Ford describes mission partners as “those who engage in creating community both inside and outside the walls of the church.”⁷⁶ Partnership honors, recognizes, and acknowledges the fact “your everyday life is an extension of our church's mission!”⁷⁷ Whereas membership tends to focus on how members participate within the walls of the church.

Ford encourages churches to think of themselves as third places—a place where lives intersect and people can share their stories. “Not every relationship in a church must involve a deep connection with another person. The development of casual relationships is every bit as important. While casual relationships can develop anywhere, our research indicates there is a correspondence between a church's buildings and its effectiveness.”⁷⁸ Creating opportunities for people to share their stories is “the best way to crack the code of a church.”⁷⁹ Understanding a church's code and being able to communicate its code with clarity makes room for people to begin the process of involvement and exploring options for ministry.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle locations 621-622.

⁷⁶ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 633.

⁷⁷ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 643.

⁷⁸ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 665.

⁷⁹ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 1504.

⁸⁰ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, Kindle location 1788.

Inclusion: Making Room for Grace by Eric Law

Eric Law uses Isaiah 11:6-9 as a visual image of how a multicultural community can co-exist. Law explains, “In order for the animals to co-exist in this Peaceable Realm, very “unnatural” behaviors are required from all who are involved.”⁸¹ He further states, “To be interculturally sensitive, we need to examine the internal instinctual part of our own culture. This means revealing unconscious values and thought patterns so that we will not simply react from our cultural instinct. The more we learn about our internal culture, the more we are aware of how our cultural values and thought patterns differ from others.”⁸² This is the first step in adaptive change that a multicultural congregation faces. Examination often takes a long time and has to be a regular practice of the congregation on an ongoing basis.

In a multicultural community, the definition of a leader is not the same in different cultures. Therefore, there are different expectations, perceptions, and behavior a leader is expected to exhibit. “Depending on the cultural contexts, a group’s expectation from the leadership could be very different. Leading or facilitating a group has to do with power—power to influence others and being aware of the power dynamic among the group members.”⁸³ A leader must determine where he or she is on the power perception continuum and examine how that influences the way he or she leads.

In order for a mono-community to become more diverse, Law frames these questions: How does a community include others that are different in race, class,

⁸¹ Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 3.

⁸² Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 9.

⁸³ Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 31.

sexuality, and culture in a way that honors the intersections within the community? “How does a community act or react when its explicit and implicit boundaries are being challenged? Does it act exclusively or inclusively?”⁸⁴ “What is the community’s leadership and organizational structure that enables or disables a person from becoming a full member?”⁸⁵

These questions determine the motivation behind wanting to be a diverse community. For example, many churches want to attract more youth. However their inquiry process asks the wrong questions: What can we do to the youth to make them more like us? How can we do what we do better so that they will come? Law explains, “Their boundary function requires potential youth members to change, to adapt to the way of life of those already in the community. The prototype of a “good” member is the adult already in the community.”⁸⁶ What Law proposes is “inclusion involves a great deal of thinking and listening when we take into consideration others’ experience, history, feelings, and so forth. Inclusion requires time and energy to follow up after a group or person has been physically included. It requires that everyone readjust. It requires change.”⁸⁷

Inclusion of outsiders has to require the existing community to let go of self-preservation.⁸⁸ “Inclusion is a discipline of extending our boundary to take into consideration another’s needs, interests, experiences, and perspective, which leads to

⁸⁴ Law, *Inclusion*, 16.

⁸⁵ Law, *Inclusion*, 17.

⁸⁶ Law, *Inclusion*, 22.

⁸⁷ Law, *Inclusion*, 7.

⁸⁸ Law, *Inclusion*, 14.

clearer understanding of others, fuller description of the issue at hand, and possibly a newly negotiated boundary of the community to which we belong.”⁸⁹ After all, this was the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus created space for people to step outside of their legalism, comfort zone, and political boundaries in order consider “a different set of assumptions, experiences, relationships, needs, and values.”⁹⁰

By creating a “grace margin” within the established boundaries of the community, the community can begin to find space where they can mitigate change within their community. Law defines the “grace margin” as “the distance between the safe and fear zones.”⁹¹ The steps to creating a grace margin are: 1) drawing an outer perimeter; 2) revisiting the boundary of the safe zone; 3) maintaining the grace margin; 4) recreating the community.⁹² Drawing the outer perimeter takes the most work because it involves “negotiating a behavioral covenant that describes the respectful grace-filled relationship among the parties involved—turning the wilderness into a grace margin.”⁹³ The community must first identify and name the fear. What is the community most afraid of when considering including the other? With the fear zone boundary in place, the community can then gently pull into the grace margin by stating what the community will not do. Law warns, “The danger here is that we may pull too far back and allow the community to retreat deep within the safe zone, where there is little room for change and

⁸⁹ Law, *Inclusion*, 42.

⁹⁰ Law, *Inclusion*, 42.

⁹¹ Law, *Inclusion*, 43.

⁹² Law, *Inclusion*, 44.

⁹³ Law, *Inclusion*, 61.

exploration. Therefore, the pulling back from the fear zone must be accompanied by the pushing out from the safe zone.”⁹⁴

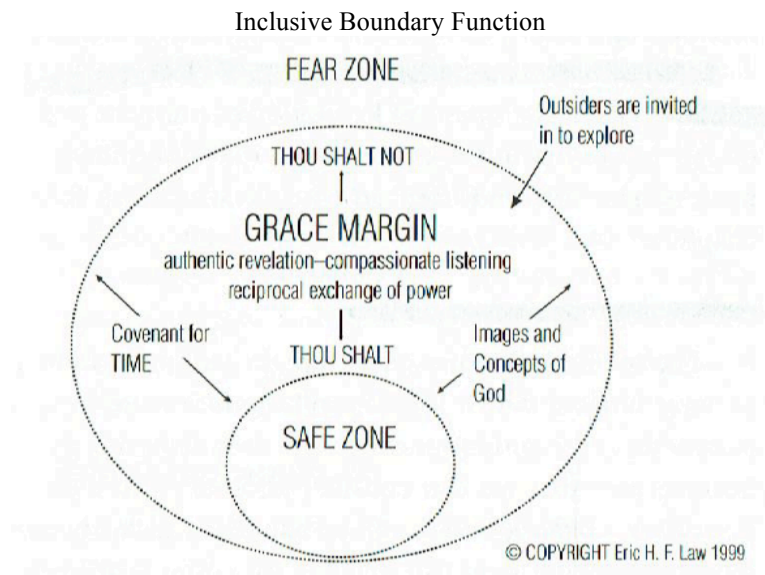


Figure 1. Eric Law’s Inclusive Boundary Function of a Christian community contains a grace margin in between the fear zone and the safe zone.⁹⁵

Existing within the grace margin is a tug-of-war between stretching the boundary too far—which pushes the community back into the fear zone—and not stretching it far enough so it remains in the safe zone.⁹⁶ Truth-telling, clear language in terms of what will be done and what will not be done, and immense amounts of patience are vital ingredients in this process. This slow process shifts the power dynamic and therefore creates an environment “where there is a symmetry of power.”⁹⁷ Symmetry of power does not mean everyone has the same amount of power at the same time, but rather there is a reciprocal exchange of power being moved back and forth. Once a “grace margin” has been established, a church can begin to experiment with ways to include the Other,

⁹⁴ Law, *Inclusion*, 62.

⁹⁵ Law, *Inclusion*, 43.

⁹⁶ Law, *Inclusion*, 63.

⁹⁷ Law, *Inclusion*, 101.

invite the Other, learn from the Other, and move forward to being a multicultural community.

The church has two main areas of work to do: internal and external. If third space is internal work and third place is external work, then how the church merges those two areas of work will affect whether the church can do both congruently. Both require the church to be vulnerable, self-reflective, and risk-taking in how they see themselves and their place in the community. Law's grace margin provides a framework of how the church can dance between the fear zone of losing who we think we are and the safe zone of what we hold of value in our collective DNA. The grace margin is the in-between space—where third space work can happen; experiments can be done; myths can be tested; identity can be reclaimed, rejected, and recreated.

Oldenburg describes third place as a neutral ground where stories are shared. However, for the Other, third places are not automatic neutral places where one feels safe to vulnerably share one's story. For that to happen, third places need to examine ways they hold commonalities and differences. If third places can establish a grace margin where all are coming with the same understanding of openness to exploration and discovery, then third places truly can be a place of mutual transformation that celebrates the past as well as future possibilities.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY OF CHANGE IN THE CHURCH

The Nature of Change

When I lived in Reno, Nevada, there were snow days at school. I loved snow days. There is nothing like waking up in the morning to feet upon feet of fresh sparkling snow. Neighborhood kids would be busy building snowmen, cross-country skiing in the streets, and sledding down the driveways. There are no snow days in San Francisco, but there are fire days. Every year, there is news of a fire in a nearby city that is blazing out of control. Even though San Francisco is miles away, the smoke from the fires can be suffocating and toxic. Unlike snow days, there is no going outside to play. The destruction and damage from these fires changes the landscape of neighborhoods and people's lives. As much as fire is destructive, fire is also beneficial. Fire can trigger germination and encourage new growth. Fire can clear undergrowth and debris to maintain health of the forest. Controlled fires can also be preventative measures for wildfires to spread.

On Easter of 1906, St. John's church had moved to the newly developed Richmond neighborhood and completed their new church building. The new building had a good mix of the old and the new. The old arch with the inscription, "Worthy is the lamb

that was slain to receive honor, glory, and blessing,” was placed over the historic Johnson organ. The old stained-glass windows peeped out along the newly popular shingle style design of the building. The redwood pews and pulpit furnishings were carried over from the first location to decorate the new chancel and sanctuary space. This final move was to be a brand new beginning for St. John’s church. However, four days later, St. John’s church was severely damaged in the 1906 earthquake—one of the deadliest earthquakes in the history of the United States. Fires broke out all over the city of San Francisco, claiming many lives and buildings. Majority of the damage was to the newly constructed sanctuary. A chimney had fallen into the historic Johnson organ and one of the stained-glass windows had been shaken loose. For almost a year, worship services were relocated downstairs in the fellowship hall while repairs were made. While the fire was devastating, the fire seemed to burn away all remnants of past values, habits, and behaviors of the congregation—setting them free to dream with optimism, persevere with dedication, and move forward in confidence to serve this up and coming neighborhood during a time when so many around them were in need to rebuild their lives and start all over again.

The Korean word for fire, *bul* (불), changes depending on what Korean word is added. When *bul* is added to “meat,” *gogi* (고기), the word is *bulgogi* (불고기), the sweet marinated beef my mother taught me to make. When you add “flower,” *ggot* (꽃), and “play” (놀이), to *bul*, the word becomes “fireworks” (불꽃놀이). “Fire” and “light,” *beet* (빛), create “glow” or “glimmer” (불빛). This *bul* is not to be confused with another meaning for *bul*, which can be equated to the prefix non- or un- when attached to other Korean words. For example, when *bul* is added to “comfortable,” *pyun* (편), it

means “uncomfortable,” (불편). Likewise, *bul* and *ahn* (안) mean “uneasiness,” (불안).

Fire is a catalyst for change, whether promoting new growth or spreading destruction.

Fire carries beauty like in the burst of a firework or glimmer and glow of a candle as well as eliciting feelings of discomfort and anxiety in the potential change it can cause.

After the 1906 fire, St. John’s church was suddenly faced with having to “rearrange and reorder their identity”¹ in a way that linked the founding pastor Dr. Scott’s call to be bold and daring with a new sense of how that call would manifest in a new neighborhood that was also rebuilding anew. This was not baptism by water, but baptism by fire, both literally and figuratively—as they had no time to prepare for the work ahead. In the midst of chaos and uncertainty, there is a tendency to revert back to what is tried and true—even if that method was not effective; however, it is familiar. St. John’s church needed to not default to its old ways of behavior that resulted in them having to move and risk it all. They already carried in the old furniture from previous sites. The question is whether other things were unintentionally carried in as well that would hold them back from risk-taking. While under Dr. Scott’s leadership, St. John’s church was “baptized by water,” it was under Dr. Scott’s son-in-law, Arthur Foster, that St. John’s church was “baptized by fire.”

Water and fire seem to be competing elements; however, in Korean culture, water and fire are not only opposites of each other, these elements cannot exist without the other. They balance each other. Just like my Korean-ness and American-ness seem to be competing identities, both are what balance me and make me who I am. St. John’s church is both a historic traditional church that has always been called to risk it all when need be.

¹ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 40.

If water represents baptismal identity, then St. John's church needs to rediscover their identity in the third space of old and new. If fire represents change, then St. John's church needs to do third space work of letting go, burning off, and spurring new growth so that it can truly be a third place where all are included and invited to build relationships.

The person affected by change rarely initiates change. Change happens without consent and without warning. Every Sunday, congregants share prayer concerns of change in health, jobs, schools, living situations, and relationships. Even change that is within a person's control takes a measure of learning and adjusting to something new—updating the software of a smart phone, a new hairstyle or way of dress, or trying out a new restaurant. However, within the walls of the church, people expect the church to remain unchanged and somewhat resistant to the changing culture outside its walls. The prayers and liturgy should remain unchanged. The décor and structure of the building should maintain historicity. Policy and statements of belief should be set in stone. Even the church is not immune to change as many churches have experienced decline in financial stability, energy for mission and programming, and decline in membership.

Kevin Ford says every church needs transformation, whether healthy and vibrant or not. If churches do not change, they have essentially decided to die.² The task of a church is to balance healthy change versus unnecessary change. Understanding the nature of change and what is involved is vital for any church's healthy transformation.³ However big or small the change, the change impacts the identity of who that person is, involves risk, and a commitment to transformation.

² Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle location 55-58.

³ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle location 55-58.

Through the flames of a burning bush, God reveals Godself to Moses—a fugitive from the law (Ex 2:15) and “slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Ex 3:10). Moses is an unlikely person to be chosen as the one who will confront Pharaoh and lead God’s people out of Egypt. That does not matter because it is more important who God is than who Moses is. At the burning bush, God tells Moses that if anyone asks who sent you, tell them “I AM” sent you. Those two words were enough to lead the people out of slavery. They were not enough as the people of Israel began to wander in the wilderness—feeling uprooted and unsettled. Throughout their wilderness journey, God reminds the people of Israel that God is a faithful God. Even when the hearts of the people of Israel waver and change, God’s promise and unconditional love remains unchanging. However God’s decision to keep God’s covenant with the people of Israel does not mean that God is stagnant, stationary, and fixed. God is the impetus that changes the people of Israel.

God sets God’s identity—revealed in blazing fire—in stone as the first commandment for the people of Israel to remember and follow: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). God is the fiery “I AM” carved in stone so the people of Israel would never forget long after the fire is gone. In the identity of God, the people of Israel’s identity changed as well. They are no longer slaves who without a name or face only existing to serve the Pharaoh’s insatiable appetite for power and wealth.⁴ They no longer depend on the powerful for their basic needs. They are no longer in competition with their neighbor to meet the daily brick quota. They

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Truth Speaks to Power: The Countercultural Nature of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 21-22.

are God's people who found their voice in their own pain and cried out to God. They are liberated to be in community and care for the neighbor.⁵

Changing the identity of a community is not easy. It can feel all consuming. It can feel as if one's previous identity is being consumed. It's no wonder that the story of Moses's transformation and Israel's transformation began with a burning bush. Indeed, these transformations took forty years in the wilderness. Rachel Held Evans says that the number forty carries significance in deliverance stories: "forty symbolizes a prolonged period of hardship, waiting, and wandering—a liminal space between the start of something and its fruition that often brings God's people into the wilderness, into the wild unknown.⁶ Forty is the in-between space where transformation takes place. Even Jesus took forty days in the wilderness to do some identity work. It took God more than forty years to change the hearts of the people of Israel. It is understandable that it should take at least that long to change the hearts of the people in church.

Pain and Loss – 한 (*han*)

Every year in California, cities and lives are changed during wildfire season. One of the main causes for the overwhelming amount of wildfires that breakout in California is due to the lack of rain. Years of drought in California have created a sufficient fuel source for fires to burn as trees and bushes that have been thirsty for water lay dry and dead. Lack of water was one of the reasons the people of Israel began to second-guess God for their deliverance out of Egypt. In Exodus 17:1-2, the people of Israel curse Moses and beg him to give them something to drink. They are thirsty. It is the kind of

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 25-26.

⁶ Evans, *Inspired*, 44.

thirst that makes a person forget all the ways God has been faithful. It is the kind of thirst that makes a person beg for relief no matter how destructive. Their thirst caused them to lose sight of the greater plan that generations before them had been thirsting for so long—freedom, sense of belonging, closer relationship with God, and a destiny beyond what they could ever imagine.

When I was pregnant with my first child, I had a love-hate relationship with water. For a child whose name bore the word “water,” being pregnant with him gave me nauseous symptoms at the sight, smell, and taste of water. Yet, my body craved water—the very thing that made it sick. I would long for water in my dreams. I would cry out for water when I could not take the dryness of my mouth any longer. I would question whether any endeavor was worth such a sacrifice.

Thirst and the inability to quench that thirst can bring out the ugly in people—not only physical thirst, but also spiritual thirst as well. Growing up between two cultures, I craved to know myself. I was thirsty to live into my baptismal identity—the identity I easily embraced when I was young. In 2004, I was the 40th Korean American clergywomen to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination. Forty seems to be a small number, however, many Korean American women are still wandering the desert of the ordination process without a rock, well, pitcher, or even a drop of water in sight to quench their thirst to serve as God has called them. There have been times when we wished there was a Moses to break the rock so that opportunities to serve as Minister of the Word and Sacrament would gush abundantly, but the reality is many Korean American women can not find a call or the needed support. Many Korean

American women hold within their bodies the pain and loss of not being able to be who God created them to be and do what God called them to do.

The Korean word for that kind of pain and loss is *han* (한). *Han* is actually untranslatable, but it encompasses feelings of suffering, sadness, stress, and pain. *Han* is a wounded heart.⁷ It is a part of the identity of the Korean people. Chung Hyun Kyung says it is “the most prevalent feeling among Korean people, who have been violated throughout their history by the surrounding powerful countries.”⁸ *Han* is submerged into the unconscious—causing people to repress their feelings of oppression, controlling thoughts, behavior, and emotions. Andrew Park makes a distinction between collective *han* and personal *han*. Personal *han* is when there is an individual clear source of who is causing someone to suffer.⁹ Personal *han* is what Kim Bok-dong, a Korean comfort woman, embodied when she was taken at the age of fourteen by the Japanese army to serve at a comfort station as a sex slave to Japanese soldiers. She says, “I was born a woman, but I never lived as a woman.”¹⁰ It took Kim almost forty years to find the confidence to tell her story. Once she told her story, her personal *han* became collective *han*.

Collective *han* exists in “victims who experience unjust suffering over many generations.”¹¹ Because of the nature of collective *han*, it has the ability to generate a

⁷ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 10.

⁸ Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 42.

⁹ Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 31.

¹⁰ Flora Drury, “Obituary: Kim Bok-dong, the South Korean ‘Comfort Woman,’” *BBC News*, February 3, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47042684>.

¹¹ Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 38.

great deal of personal *han* as people are subjected to systematic and collective injustices such as ageism, sexism, hierarchical social structures, racism, religious exclusivism, heterosexism, or militarism.¹² Chung Hyun Kyung states how women have been particularly overcome with *han*. “Korean women’s life experience is *han* itself. The resentment, indignation, sense of defeat, resignation, and nothingness in *han* make many Korean women brokenhearted and physically sick.”¹³ When Kim passed away at the age of 92 without ever receiving an apology from the Japanese government, her funeral procession included passing by the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Mourners cried out “Japan must apologize!” and waved banners and yellow butterflies. With the help of her fellow people, Kim was able to complete “her final act of resistance against a country which had stolen so much from her.”¹⁴

The reason why *han* is embedded in the identity of Korean people is because *han* is not something a person can be cured from or necessarily overcome. Using Carl Jung’s work on the “collective unconscious,” Andrew Park says *han* is passed down from generation to generation through the structure of *han*-memory. The bodies of Korean people store memories of the past. This *han*-memory has the power to govern behavior, thoughts, and habits.¹⁵ Recent studies have shown that even trees have memory down to

¹² Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 45.

¹³ Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*, 66.

¹⁴ Drury, “Obituary: Kim Bok-dong, the South Korean ‘Comfort Woman,’” *BBC News*.

¹⁵ Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 39.

their molecular identity where a tree's previous personal experience influences their response to their current environmental situation such as drought.¹⁶

For the Korean people, *han*-memory contains years of identity stripped away during the Japanese colonization of Korea in the early 1900s. My father-in-law remembers speaking Japanese in school and Korean at home. Even his name was changed. Outside the home, his name was Giryo Kanehara, a derivative of his Korean name, Ki Joon Kim. For the Korean people, *han*-memory also contains pain from separation of family and their own people when Korea was divided along the 38th parallel by two outside superpowers—the United States and the then Soviet Union. For Korean women, *han*-memory is filled with centuries of patriarchal hierarchy, intense labor, domestic abuse, and lack of power. For many like my parents who immigrated to the United States, *han*-memory is consumed with continual racist experiences, employment struggles, lack of community, and sacrifices made for their children. Growing up, I inherited this *han*-memory through storytelling, folktales, behavior, rituals, and unsaid expectations. Carrying the weight of my parent's *han*-memory was burdensome and suffocating. It is understandable why my husband's paternal grandfather would want the image and meaning of "still waters" rooted in my children's generation. Their name, *Soo*, carries essence of *han*-memory of their ancestors and yet is fluid enough so that the identity of the next generation is not predicated on sustaining the *han*-memory but can change and evolve. *Han* is a result of a loss in one's personhood, sense of self, and wholeness as a human being.

Heifetz and Linsky say people resist change because they resist loss.¹⁷ The loss

¹⁶ University of Toronto Scarborough, "Forest trees remember their roots," *Science Daily*, July 12, 2011, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110711164557.htm>.

they feel is connected to their values, beliefs, and habits—characteristics that define who they are. When those are challenged, people’s sense of identity feel threatened. Even if the change is necessary for a brighter future, people will only see the losses that will need to be sustained to make those changes happen.¹⁸ To change the way people see and do things is to challenge how they define themselves.¹⁹ It hits the core of personal and communal identity. Churches contain lots of “*han*-memory.” Either the church has been creators of *han* or recipients of those with personal and collective *han*.

Churches have been silently and actively participating in holding up hierarchical social structures; justifying discrimination according to race, gender, or sexuality; endorsing wars; enforcing slavery and genocide; and promoting colonization. Churches have also been safe havens for those who have been vulnerable to systematic injustices of the world. When visitors walk through the doors of a church, it is unclear what church baggage or experience they bring with them. For many visitors, it is a risk to step foot inside a church—not knowing how they will be welcomed and accepted. As adaptive changes are made, who knows what cord it will pull on someone’s identity or *han*-memory. Therefore, “adaptive work often demands some disloyalty to our roots.”²⁰ Heifetz and Linsky give examples of this: “To tell someone that he should stop being prejudiced is really to tell him that some of the lessons of his loving grandfather were wrong. To tell a Christian missionary that, in the name of love, she may be doing damage

¹⁷ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 11.

¹⁸ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 12.

¹⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 27

²⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 93.

to a native community, calls into question the meaning of mission itself.”²¹

As the church enters into the process of change, they need to examine what loss they are grieving—the loss of holding up a system of patriarchy, homophobia, white supremacy? Or is it the loss of having majority voice, influencing societal culture, and possessing large campuses and buildings? If so, then that is not loss, that is privilege. For those living on the edge, they never have the privilege of considering what they have to lose. Being *han* people is holding loss. For my mother, her *han*-memory was stories of loss—loss of her sense of self, her language, her country, and her daughter. Without addressing or acknowledging it, *han*-memory influences behaviors that can perpetuate unhealthy patterns: forcing people to adapt; developing unspoken norms; and creating an environment where people resist change.²² “Culture shapes churches, and churches shape people—often through the power of what remains unspoken.”²³

As the church explores their *han*-memory, whether recipients or perpetrators, those living on the edge can be “trainers for the church’s future strength” because they have “generations of experience living on the edges, displaced from the center, as more than survivors.”²⁴ As a pastor of mostly small congregations, I work with churches that daily face an outlook of loss—living in financial vulnerability, lack of people in the pews, and a clear vision of healthier future. For churches just arriving to what Bolsinger calls

²¹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 93.

²² Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle Location 242.

²³ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle Locations 254-255.

²⁴ Steve Yamaguchi, interview, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, August 28, 2014, quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 193.

“uncharted territory,”²⁵ I say, “It’s ok. The water is fine. It’s going to hurt, you are going to have to get used to the temperature, but it’s going to be fine. Come on in.”²⁶

Untangle the Pain and Loss – 한풀이 (*han-pu-ri*)

It did not take long for the people of Israel to begin to question whether they made the right decision to follow Moses. Changing their identity from Pharaoh’s cheap labor to God’s freed people was a dangerous endeavor—threatening their sense of security and stability. At the Red Sea when Pharaoh’s army was chasing them, the people of Israel cried out to Moses, “Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt that you took us away to die in the desert? . . . It would have been better for us to work for the Egyptians than to die in the desert” (Ex 14:11-12). For the people of Israel, the loss of familiarity no matter how destructive outweighed the joy of the unknown possible future that required them to trust in a God they never had experience trusting before. Trusting in God required them to change their ideology of power. That change would happen as they experience God’s distributive grace and provision through the wilderness.²⁷ The loss the people of Israel felt is rooted in the collective suffering generations had embodied under the hand of Pharaoh. Trusting in God is untangling generations of pain and loss so that they are freed to know the abundance of grace that God offers.

The untangling of *han* is called *han-pu-ri* (한풀이). Originally, *han-pu-ri* is a Korean shamanistic tradition—where Korean shamans create opportunity for collective

²⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 14.

²⁶ Theresa Cho, phone interview, September 3, 2014, quoted in Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 195.

²⁷ Brueggemann, *Truth Speaks to Power*, 39.

healing and repentance for the ghosts that have passed with unresolved issues.²⁸

Especially for poor Korean women, *han-pu-ri* was a space where they were unencumbered by male-centered religious authorities and could freely release their accumulated *han*.²⁹

There are three important steps to *han-pu-ri*.³⁰ The first step is speaking and hearing. People must first break their silence and let their *han* out publicly. The sound of *han* is a “cry, plea, and invocation, . . . bursting out from a [person’s] despair and impasse.”³¹ Much like the people of Israel bursting out and crying in Exodus 2:23 about the hard labor they endured, the sound of their *han* awakens God to respond, “I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain” (Ex 3.7). Growing up in the Korean church, I sometimes attended morning prayer with my parents. These morning prayer sessions were not quiet moments of silent prayer or collective responsive readings of prayer. Often, people were wailing, crying, and pleading in prayer to God—freeing themselves of their *han*-ridden burdens. *Han-pu-ri* is not an individual activity. It involves the community. The community has to hear the *han*-ridden stories. *Han-pu-ri* is an act of resistance to the current injustices of the world and holds the community to accountable to those injustices by demanding action. Chung Hyun Kyung says, “Storytelling has been women’s way of inheriting truth in many Asian countries

²⁸ Chung Hyun Kung, “‘Han-pu-ri’ Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective,” in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, eds. Virginia Fabella M. M. and Sun Ai Lee Park (Eugene: Orbis Books, 1989), 143.

²⁹ Chung, “‘Han-pu-ri’ Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective,” in *We Dare to Dream*, 143.

³⁰ Chung, “‘Han-pu-ri’ Doing Theology from Korean Women’s Perspective,” in *We Dare to Dream*, 143.

³¹ Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*, 99.

because the written, literary world has belonged to privileged males. The power of storytelling lies in its embodied truth. Their bodies record what has happened in their lives. Their bodies remember what it is like to be a no-body and what it is like to be a some-body.”³² Whether in the work of intersectionality, discovering code in a church, or main activity of a third place, storytelling is the starting point.

The second step is naming. Naming the source of *han* and the oppression can be liberating and empowering. Naming invites the community to participate in the untangling of *han*—becoming co-sufferers with the suffering. It further leads the community into the third step, which is changing the unjust situation through action. Depending on what is named, change through *han-pu-ri* has involved rituals, songs, dances. *Han-pu-ri* has taken more militant strides as well as farmers, workers, slum dwellers, and women’s organized political movements have been impetus for change in government and society.³³ When the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea and safely escaped Pharaoh’s army, they danced and sang for the first time (Ex 15.20). They were free to celebrate their emancipation from a life of slavery. *Han-pu-ri* for the people of Israel involved “sounding the cry, contesting for the alternative, acting out the alternative, and dancing out beyond slavery.”³⁴

On May 23, 1991, the Korean American Presbyterian Clergywomen (KAPCW) was organized. The group was born out of a desire to support Korean American clergywomen as well as provide support for Korean American women in the ordination

³² Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*, 104.

³³ Chung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*, 43.

³⁴ Brueggemann, *Truth Speaks to Power*, 38.

process in PCUSA.³⁵ The beginning of KAPCW was promising—receiving financial support and staff resources from ten different major Presbyterian ministry organizations.

The theme of the first conference was “The Prophetic Role of Korean American Clergywomen in the 21st Century.” However, the Korean American clergywomen and the Korean male pastors from these national organizations had different expectations. Only the voices of Korean male pastors were spoken from the pulpit with the exception of one speaker, a white clergywoman. It seemed odd that Korean American clergywomen voices were not being heard in a conference that was about them.

By the second day, the women had gathered and decided they needed to change what was happening. If this group was going to truly support Korean American clergywomen, then it needed to be led by Korean American clergywomen. The next day, the participants did the speaking and the men were left to do the hearing. The participants named what they needed and their disappointment in the conference thus far. Then, they presented the changes that would be made. First, they got rid of the hierarchical structure and opted for three regional co-leaders. They also decided to formally separate from the National Korean Presbyterian Caucus, sacrificing financial support. After the decision was voted and approved, the participants celebrated by spontaneously dancing and singing.

Rev. Mary Paik, the first clergywomen I had met, was on the planning team for the next conference. This conference would be vastly different from the previous, focusing mostly on storytelling. Women would be able to share their stories of *han*,

³⁵ Unzu Lee, “History of Korean American Presbyterian Clergywomen (KAPCW),” in *Here I Am: Faith Stories of Korean American Clergywomen*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2015), 8.

experience *han-pu-ri*, and empower each other in ministry by answering the questions: “Where was I? Where am I? Where will I be? Where will I like to be?”³⁶

Han-pu-ri may take different forms depending on the type of church. For Korean churches, *han-pu-ri* took the form of morning prayer sessions. For mostly white churches, *han-pu-ri* will need to take the form of listening and being silent witnesses so they may be transformed by the stories they hear, the injustices named, and the changes needed so that church systems and structures do not perpetuate further injustices. For St. John’s church, *han-pu-ri* will shape what kind of third place St. John’s church will be. In order for St. John’s church to be an inclusive place where people of all different backgrounds can exist and build relationships, St. John’s church needs to create an environment where *han* stories can be shared by those on the edges; *han* stories can be heard by the privileged; and both *han* people and privileged people can be mutually transformed in order to create change in their community.

Church in the 21st Century in the Third Space of Christendom and Post-Christendom

Churches in the third space between Christendom to post-Christendom are asking similar questions: “how we should live?” and “what we should do?” A prominent attribute of Christendom is the church’s shift from the marginalized point of view to the more dominant voices. The church and the reading of scripture increasingly were used to support and reinforce the wealthy over the poor and patriarchal hierarchy within the church.³⁷ During this time, the church system was established—Sunday as official day of

³⁶ Lee, “History of Korean American Presbyterian Clergywomen (KAPCW),” in *Here I Am*, 10.

³⁷ Lloyd Pietersen, *Reading the Bible after Christendom* (Crownhill: Paternoster, 2011), Kindle locations 652-654.

obligatory church attendance; creation of a tithing system; construction of massive ornate church buildings; distinction between clergy and laity; and the development of specialized programs.³⁸ The church became the center and was normalized into everyday culture. “As the church came to power, . . . church could far more easily identify with the wealth and status of Solomon than the relative poverty of Jesus!”³⁹

As the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom happened, churches began moving from the center to the margins. Christianity was no longer a part of the dominant culture and therefore could no longer expect to experience automatic privileges and influence over society. Sunday is no longer protected for church attendance. Church programs and services are in competition with secular organizations.⁴⁰ “Churches can no longer operate mainly in institutional mode but must learn to operate once again as part of a movement.”⁴¹

The third space of Christendom and post-Christendom is where most churches exist. Many are struggling to find secure footing in the third space. Elements that define a healthy church are no longer valid. Methods of evangelism and seeking new members are ineffective. Churches today are in the third space where identity is “split apart, unsettled, erased, and broken down.” Churches hanging on to Christendom are thirsty and will have to rediscover their reason of existence if they want a change to flourish in post-Christendom times. A starting point is listening to Christians on the margins—voices that are reading scripture from places other than the center. Theology in postmodern times is

³⁸ Pietersen, *Reading the Bible after Christendom*, Kindle locations 174-209.

³⁹ Pietersen, *Reading the Bible after Christendom*, Kindle locations 656-658.

⁴⁰ Pietersen, *Reading the Bible after Christendom*, Kindle locations 216-225.

⁴¹ Pietersen, *Reading the Bible after Christendom*, Kindle locations 228-229.

to unsettle what is regarded as traditional, normal, and ordinary experiences, perspectives, interpretations, and practices.⁴² Practice of theology today needs to awaken the shadow side of postmodern narratives biased by the history of white supremacy⁴³, colonialism, and racial discrimination.⁴⁴

This movement towards the margins can spark white fragility in churches that are still predominantly white. White fragility is rooted in entitlement and superiority, yet triggered by discomfort and anxiety.⁴⁵ When faced with loss of power and control or faced with their own prejudices, feelings of shame, fear, guilt, and anger can surface—resulting in behaviors of avoidance, withdrawal, crying, denial, and arguing.⁴⁶ Reflecting through shared stories can address those feelings by asking oneself, “I am white and I have had X experience. How did X shape me as a result of also being white?”⁴⁷ By reframing storytelling in this way, one may be able to see and grapple with the collective messages received as members of a larger shared culture and let go of individual narratives that may blind an individual from their personal impact and participation.

Robin DiAngelo says reflecting on one’s race can commonly trigger white fragility. In order to “build stamina,” white people must first name their race.⁴⁸ The

⁴² Tom Beaudoin, “Postmodern Practical Theology,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, eds. Cahalan, Kathleen and Gordon S. Mikoski (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 189.

⁴³ Beaudoin, “Postmodern Practical Theology,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 190.

⁴⁴ Beaudoin, “Postmodern Practical Theology,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 191.

⁴⁵ Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 2.

⁴⁶ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 118-119.

⁴⁷ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 13.

⁴⁸ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 7.

process of naming race leads to discovering unaware racist patterns. This awareness can lead to transforming feelings of shame, fear, and guilt into gratitude, humility, compassion, and interest—eliciting behaviors of reflection, understanding, listening, believing, and apology.⁴⁹

As a Korean American who has had to use creativity to find my place in this world, discover my identity in this country, and search for belonging in my faith tradition, I have been groomed to lead and guide my congregation in this third space between Christendom and post-Christendom. Courtney Goto says “being Asian American is an exercise in creative living.”⁵⁰ Whether in their own identity, sense of belonging, and how they live in faith, it is pieced together in collage-like form and maintains fluidity depending on the context. Therefore, Asian American theologians are constantly deconstructing and reconstructing theology, raising questions, “Which cultural norms should be resisted, upheld, or retrieved?” “How do Asian American communities claim and live the Christian gospel in ways that are both authentic and faithful?”⁵¹

As a Korean American pastor, my cultural stories and experiences color and shape the theology I share in preaching and leading. While my intention is not to shift people to my cultural purview, my starting point is an advantage and asset to interpretively guide my congregation to dive deeper into their own theological questions as well as a bigger question of whether white normativity is a part of the DNA of St. John’s church. Asian American practical theologians begin not only on the margins, but

⁴⁹ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 141.

⁵⁰ Courtney T. Goto, “Asian American Practical Theologies,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 32.

⁵¹ Goto, “Asian American Practical Theologies,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 37.

challenge the dominant narratives of God and the church. Creativity's partner is critical thinking. Creativity does not happen in the absence of analysis, critique, or truth-telling. "New possibilities feed critical thinking."⁵² Creativity and critical thinking are vital tools for churches in this post-modern time to discover the answers to the questions, "how we should live?" and "what we should do?"

As a clergywoman and the first clergywoman ordained and installed at St. John's church, my presence challenges the heteronormative translations of God's word and unravels the tight threads of God's identity being only male. Tom Beaudoin states "theology is already a sexual system, but practical theology as a feminist and liberative theology can keep it from the idolatries of monotheism, monosexuality, and monoculturalism."⁵³ Therefore, as a Korean American clergywoman, I am an interpretive guide in post-Christendom. Diversity, the Word of God, and the church are to be dialogue partners—constantly listening and learning from one another.

Managing the Grief of St. John's church Changing Identity

While Rev. Lloyd Carrick's tenure marked Christendom days at St. John's church, Rev. David White's tenure showed signs of struggle in the third space of Christendom and post-Christendom. During the 70s, 80s, and 90s, the congregation was in survival mode. Rev. White took every opportunity to address the challenges St. John's church was facing in the church newsletter. Even the name of the newsletter, *Provoke*, was aimed to stir up the congregation to make changes. In the article, "Why Rope Off the Back of the Pews?" he shared the reality that with a seating capacity of over 340, St.

⁵² Goto, "Asian American Practical Theologies," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 37.

⁵³ Goto, "Asian American Practical Theologies," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, 194.

John's church has more empty than occupied seats during worship service.⁵⁴ Rev. White also attempted many study groups where the congregation studied the process of change—reading *Rocking the Ark* by Grace Ann Goodman, nine case studies of traditional churches in the process of change. These attempted changes took a toll on both the pastor and the congregation.

St. John's church never saw days like Rev. Carrick's time again. Rev. White's tenure was the beginning of what would be the new normal—existing in third space. How, then, can St. John's church embrace the loss of what as before and embrace what is now so that it can once again be “daring and confident”? By calling a pastor whose sense of personal identity and understanding of collective *han* gave her great familiarity with the power of wholeheartedly entering into a third space.

St. John's Church Calls an Associate Pastor

I was hired in 2003 as an associate pastor. Rev. Anderson had been serving as pastor for twelve years when I arrived. He spent most of the twelve years building up the endowment and stabilizing the church. However, the congregation felt that their small size prohibited them from living out their full potential. In a 2002 mission study, an assessment of the congregation and neighborhood was done. In the mission study, it states “St. John's remains an overwhelmingly white congregation despite being located in a heavily Asian community. We must build relationships with the Asian (primarily Chinese) community and attract Asian members in far greater numbers.” Therefore, “to implement this strategy, we contemplate calling a thirty-something Asian associate pastor (preferably Chinese American) who has the ability and skills to reach these populations.”

⁵⁴ David White, “Why Rope Off the Back of the Pews?” *The Church Messenger* Vol. XLI, number 6 (San Francisco, St. John's Presbyterian Church, February 1969).

My first two years at St. John's church were confusing. My understanding of my position was to focus on children and family ministry and be a good pastoral partner to Rev. Anderson. However, there was incongruence between the church's expectations of my position compared to what Rev. Anderson expressed. This became clear during a review of my position after two years. During a congregational meeting, concerns were raised that my presence had not brought in more Chinese American families. Growth was crucial because there was only enough in the budget to fund my position for three years and two years had already passed. Discussion and debate ensued about whether expectations that I would bring in more Chinese American families were realistic. At one point, a Chinese American member highlighted the fact St. John's church hired a Korean American pastor to attract Chinese American families. While tensions were high, this moment brought to light a few observations: 1) The desire to attract Chinese American families exposed how white St. John's church truly was; 2) St. John's church approached an adaptive challenge with a technical solution;⁵⁵ and 3) St. John's church was repeating past mistakes without realizing it.

Not the First Asian American Associate Pastor

To be sure, I was not the first Asian American associate pastor. In 1973, Rev. Wesley Woo had been hired as an associate pastor to reach "the new wave of Chinese Americans" arriving in the Richmond neighborhood. "The purpose of this project is to provide a new and needed ministry to a growing Asian population of which the majority

⁵⁵ Technical solutions are the implementation of best practices based on expertise and current know-how. Because adaptive challenges requires changes in people's behavior, beliefs, and values, there are no best practices—only a process of discovery of possibilities, letting go of old patterns, and developing a capacity to create anew.

are Chinese in the Richmond district of San Francisco. The long range goal is to develop a renewal ministry of St. John's Presbyterian Church which addresses itself to and with the social and spiritual needs and perspectives of Chinese and other Asians in the Richmond community."⁵⁶

Unlike me, Rev. Woo seemed groomed for the job. He grew up in San Francisco and attended Presbyterian Church in Chinatown. He also worked at Cameron House, a Presbyterian organization that worked with youth in Chinatown as well as domestic violence intervention. After he graduated from San Francisco Theological Seminary, he spent a year in Hong Kong to study. When he was installed as associate pastor at St. John's church, he was already living in the Richmond neighborhood.

During his time, Rev. Woo began a bilingual school and was a catalyst for new service agencies in the community. A separate worship service was held for the Chinese American congregation. Rev. Woo seemed to be meeting the expectations of what he was hired to do. Yet because the growing Chinese American congregation never integrated with the struggling mostly white congregation, tensions rose between the two and session ended Rev. Woo's service after two years.

Dissolving the relationship with Rev. Woo exposed St. John's church's true expectations of the project, which was to strengthen the white congregation's financial and membership stability. Serving the growing Asian population in the Richmond district was really serving themselves. When St. John's church realized they were not growing in the way they intended, St. John's church deemed the project a failure. The project was a failure, but not because it did not achieve its goals. It was a failure in the ability of St.

⁵⁶ *Provoke*, January 1974.

John's church to name and recognize their white fragility when they saw they were changing into a church where they were slowly becoming the minority.

Starting Over

Due to miscommunication and unrealistic expectations, St. John's church and I agreed that this was an opportunity to start over and begin anew with a fresh focus, clear expectations, and reasonable goals. This was an opportunity to speak and listen; name fears and hopes; and move towards changing behavior and habits to enable needed changes for the future. A part of what needed to be named was the willingness for St. John's church to clearly see me for more than my Asian-ness and see the Chinese American neighbors as more than just pew fillers. Just as I desired for my mother to see me for me when I took her to see *The Joy Luck Club* movie, I needed St. John's church to do so as well.

With a clearer sense of my role as associate pastor, I resorted to my previous training as a teacher for children with autism. As a teacher, I was trained to assess each student on their strengths and growth areas in order to develop achievable goals that would be evaluated at a given time frame. Each student had an Individual Educational Program (IEP) to follow. As the IEP is followed, it is expected that behaviors will arise as goals are worked on so sometimes a Behavior Intervention Plan is also integrated.

A team was created to develop an IEP for St. John's church. The IEP was basically an outreach strategy plan that did not consist of technical solutions, but instead a guideline on how to conduct ministry at St. John's church. First, the team spoke with recent visitors and learned how many had recently moved into the city or were experiencing a major life transition. The team also listened to current voices that spoke

about church in postmodern times. A popular book at the time was Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church*. What resonated with the team was Warren's quote that "no single church can possibly reach everyone. It takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people."⁵⁷ In other words, "You will attract who you are, not who you want."⁵⁸ Who St. John's church was at the time was a community defined as: politically, theologically, and culturally diverse; informal and traditional; San Francisco natives, as well as new to the area; young and old. Given this, the common thread that connects the community together is the desire to be a part of a safe, open, and welcoming community that strives to embody God's reality and share Christ's hope in their daily lives. The team changed the focus from "English speaking Asian community with particular emphasis on Chinese Americans" to those who intentionally seek to be a part of a faith community and find connection in this ever-changing and transient city.

Next, the team named what fears exist as they look to the future and change course. The main fear was rooted in the myth of what causes church growth, such as good programming and solid preaching. "Knowing what is not a cause of growth is just as important as knowing what is."⁵⁹ Studying the research in *Beyond the Ordinary: 10 Strengths of U.S. Congregations* by Cynthia Woolever & Deborah Bruce, the determined factors that directly affected church growth were participation in the congregation, caring for children and youth and welcoming new people. Churches with strength in these three areas also showed strength in growing spiritually, sharing faith, and looking towards the

⁵⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 156.

⁵⁸ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 177.

⁵⁹ Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary: 10 Strengths of U.S. Congregations* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004), 114.

future.⁶⁰ Given this, leadership planning at St. John’s church had to encompass these characteristics: welcome, nurture, and commitment. In whatever the church plans, they must encompass the following questions: “How do we welcome others?” “How do we nurture them in their faith?” “How are they invited to commit their faith in action?”

Lastly, the team created guidelines to direct future changes. The team started by defining what outreach and evangelism means. Brian McLaren says, “Good evangelism is the process of being friendly without discrimination and influencing all of one’s friends toward better living, through good deeds and good conversations.”⁶¹ Therefore outreach and evangelism is about building community and building relationships both inside and outside the church; providing opportunities for people to connect to each other, God, and the community; and personal one-on-one relationships—sharing faith stories with friends, family, and co-workers. Outreach and evangelism happens everywhere and in everything. Everything done is outreach. Every member should be engaged in participation. Every structure should creatively facilitate and reiterate outreach. Everything done should be visibly clear and understood by the entire congregation. Everything done should be interconnected and communicated.

Looking back, I am not sure why I had the confidence to help St. John’s church hit reset. Seminary certainly did not prepare or train me with the skills to do so. However, I grew up with *han* people my whole life—people who have had to reset as immigrants and with each loss they encountered. While I have not experienced the same depth of loss as my parent’s generation and the generations before me, I have had to speak the

⁶⁰ Woolever and Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary*, 39-40.

⁶¹ Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 15.

language and translate to them what it means to live in a “land of opportunity.” I have also had to interpret for the majority white culture what it means to be a person of color living in white America. I have been the Asian friend to explain to my white friends what it is like to be an Asian American. I have been the Asian American representative on many Presbyterian committees speaking on behalf of all Asian Americans. The confidence I had to help St. John’s church start over was actually the familiarity I felt having been in this situation so many times in my life.

This third space between Christendom and post-Christendom that St. John’s church find itself is not much different than the third space many second-generation Korean American churches exist in as “they are charting out an entirely new path, by creating and inhabiting an innovative, self-constructed third space” that blurs the lines between immigrant churches they grew up in and mainstream churches they do not feel comfortable in.⁶² This kind of construction is both an act of resistance and affiliation—resisting the old identities and behaviors that are prohibitive and affiliating with identities that preserve the essence of who they are as they move forward.⁶³ I may not have learned this in seminary, but I did learn in it at the University of Second-Generation Immigrant Life.

⁶² Sharon Kim, *A Faith Of Our Own: Second-Generation Spirituality in Korean American Churches* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University, 2010), Kindle locations 179-180.

⁶³ Kim, *A Faith of Our Own*, Kindle location 181.

CHAPTER 5

THIRD PLACE THEOLOGY

In seminary, I was diagnosed with an Arnold-Chiari brain malformation¹ that went undiagnosed for ten years. While brain surgery alleviated the severe symptoms, I was left with numbness in both my arms and hands. Because of my lack of ability to feel pain, I never notice when I am in pain or hurt myself. My arms and hands would expose evidence of moments when I should have felt pain but did not—burn marks from baking cookies; bruises from bumping into a wall; or years of arthritis in my left shoulder that eventually led to a complete shoulder replacement at the age of forty-five. For years, I did not know my body was in pain until I was unable to lift and use my left arm. Pain does not only signal when a body is hurt, but also assists in the recovery and healing process as well. Pain is important to know the limitations of the body in healing or if something is wrong. Because of my condition, my surgeon suggested I join a rehabilitation pool as I recover.

I am not the usual customer at the rehab pool. My age singles me out as most are either children taking swimming lessons or senior adults in physical therapy. The rehab

¹ Arnold-Chiari brain malformation II is a condition where the cerebellum and brain stem extend into the hole in the base of the skull where the spinal cord passes. Some symptoms are numbness, dizziness, and headaches.

pool is like an exclusive club since one has to have some part of the body aching, replaced, or waiting replacement. The pool is specifically designed to accommodate this clientele by setting the water temperature at 92 degrees, dividing the swimming lanes into slow swimmers and medium-slow swimmers, and creating all entrances accessible for all abilities. The only mark that shows that I am one of them is the surgical scar on my left shoulder. If third places are to be both inclusive of different people as well as meeting places for people with common abilities and interests, then this place has become my third place. It is a place where I meet people I would not usually encounter daily. Small talk of “How is the weather?” or “How was your weekend?” is replaced with “How’s the weather affecting your arthritis?” or “Hey, what are you taking? Advil or Tylenol?” What we have in common is the condition of our body is a huge part of our identity, how we function, and how we value ourselves. We greet each other knowing that we are in pain. This third place has given me the capacity to manage the new change in my identity as someone who is managing pain; hear stories from other people in pain that broaden my perspective on life and God; and meet people different from my other circles of friends, work, and home.

If I found my identity challenging when I was younger to be seen in the image of God as a non-white and female being, my new identity as someone with bodily limitations opened a newfound understanding. Nancy Eiesland, who has a congenital bone condition and spinal scoliosis, saw God as a disabled God. She says, “In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the

disabled God.”² Jesus is not revealed as healed and whole, but his injury is a part of his identity as the resurrected Christ. As “nonconventional bodies which often times dissatisfy and fail us,”³ we identify with the resurrected Jesus as beings with dignity and integrity with lives worth living. This image of the resurrected Christ as the disabled God is liberating because this image defines healing and wholeness in a new way. Healing and wholeness is not about returning to a place of perfection. Healing and wholeness is about feeling complete and of value no matter what state the body is in. If St. John’s church is to follow and believe in the resurrected Christ, then healing and wholeness is not about St. John’s church resurrecting to its former self of large programs and membership. Healing and wholeness for St. John’s church today is seeing itself—scars and all—aligned with the many people who are also in the same boat and being transformed by this new understanding of being. Just like my shoulder will never be what it used to be, St. John’s church will never be what it used to be. However, with constant maintenance and learning to adapt to new ways, it is possible to be the body of Christ—whether the parts have changed or not.

Oldenburg says the novelty of third places is their predictable unpredictability. It may be predictable in the sense that there are the same regular people, but it is unpredictable what direction a conversation may take and what revelations will come. “What trivia will be dredged up from the past and what outlandish speculations made about the future? Who will drag in a tidbit of gossip and how reliable and how spicy will it be? What cases shall this court of universal appeals try on any given day and what

² Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 100.

³ Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 103.

judgments shall its judges render? Will the tone be argumentative or agreeable? Will one nod in sympathetic accord or stare incredulously at the author of some asinine pronouncement? Will one be amused, challenged, or merely reinforced in one's prejudices?"⁴ At the pool, the conversations are predictably similar to any other third place around the city, but unpredictable when issues of health care, age, dignity, and respect intersect with personal stories of struggle and vulnerability. For many at St. John's church, housing and making a living wage is not a pressing issue. Many work in the financial district or for a technology company that provides a salary where they can afford housing in San Francisco. For those I have met at the pool, they are vulnerable and reliant on rent control. If their health prevents them from working, their ability to pay rent is in jeopardy. This concern causes stress that affects their health and sends them in a cycle of perpetual vulnerability.

The predictable unpredictability characteristic of third places is an effective exercise in increasing people's ability to improv or adapt to the daily changes in their lives as well as changes that happen in the church. Third places direct attention away from individual needs and towards the neighbor. For churches to be third places, there must be a balance of inclusivity and hospitality with acts of love towards the neighbor. Therefore, third place theology is rooted in the Greatest Commandment: "You must love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39).

The Call To Love Our Neighbors

Because San Francisco is a diverse city, a diverse array of people walks through the doors of St. John's church. St. John's church is a mixture of faith, theology, and

⁴ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, 46.

tradition. Some grew up in the Presbyterian Church. Others define themselves as agnostic or atheist. A few are Jewish, Seventh Day Adventist, Unitarian or Catholic. St. John's church is moderate to liberal in theological and political views. While some are conservative, they are tolerant of more liberal views given the nature of the city. St. John's church has gradually become more diverse in age, socio-economically, and racial-ethnically as well. Richard Osmer says the task of congregational leaders is to be interpretive guides so that a congregation can celebrate diversity and navigate through decisions that support such diversity.⁵ As interpretive guides, the challenge for St. John's church is how to do the interpretative task in a diverse, ever-changing faith community. How do we interpret God's story in the midst of our current stories also acknowledging that there are not many interpretive guides that hold the 147 years of history of St. John's church? I personally struggle with this as well. As I continue to live in the United States and my parents continue to age, I am losing them as interpretive guides to my heritage and culture—connecting me to who I am as a Korean. I have to ask them to tell and retell stories so they become my stories when I tell them. For the few at St. John's church that still remember the heroes, the cherished moments, and the proud moments, it is important for them to keep telling those stories until they become our stories that we can retell and interpret for ourselves.

While loving the neighbor within a congregation can be challenging, the task is more challenging outside the church. Across the street from St. John's church is Congregation Emanu-el, the largest synagogue on the West Coast. The synagogue adheres to a strong pro-Israel stance, while Rev. Anderson has been active in Palestinian rights and activism. Depending on the leadership at the synagogue, this has brought great

⁵ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 127.

tension or, at best, moderate tolerance. While St. John's church has not taken a stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict, the church gives space for their pastors to follow their passions. Rev. Anderson's involvement on the national and local Presbyterian level of Palestinian issues has exposed St. John's church to a wider political and religious discussion on what it means to have a Christian voice to global injustices that have impact on our neighbors. These discussions have led to clarifying how the language defines St. John's church:

- Words and images in worship should welcome all, without pain or barrier.
- We use the range of language of scripture & tradition, reflecting God's diversity as feminine, masculine, powerful & vulnerable.
- We honor the integrity of the cultural language of oppressed people groups, though we may find it unsettling.
- We say "Israel" meaning ancient Israel, not the current Israeli state.
- We seek to imitate Christ's language of peace & equality, amidst the oppressive, patriarchal culture of Bible times.
- We declare a message of inclusion, deliverance & justice for all persons.

These words were not created in a vacuum, but created from naming the competing identities that St. John's church encompasses. By interacting with neighbors and hearing stories of first time visitors, St. John's church heard how clarity and transparency of language was needed to communicate to those entering through the doors how they were being included and welcomed. What St. John's church heard was even though it holds its individual church identity, it also holds the wider church identity that is expressed through media, history, and people's past church experiences. For some, the language used communicated openness and hospitality. For some, the language made clear where St. John's church stood as well. Through these words, St. John's church recognizes the ways we strive to be inclusive and yet acknowledge how the wider church has put up barriers between who is in and who is out. St. John's church embraces the breadth of vocabulary and images to describe God and yet know many refer to God using

male language and imagery. St. John's church strives to learn from those most vulnerable in our community and yet know that what we learn may be uncomfortable to hear. Lastly, St. John's church makes it a priority to be inclusive of many faiths and yet will stand with oppressed people no matter what race, faith, or cultural background.

Sometimes serving neighbors can simultaneously disrupt neighbors. St. John's church has a weekly food pantry that has become a third place bringing neighbors together. On Saturday mornings, it is a different kind of church than on Sunday mornings. Mandarin, Cantonese, and Russian are the dominant languages spoken. Regular volunteers are a mixture of members of St. John's church and next-door neighbors. Many come to volunteer to hand out groceries and meet neighbors they would not have encountered during their regular weekday. The food pantry serves approximately 200 families within the same zip code. At 6:30 every Saturday morning, neighbors line up down the sidewalk and tons of food is unloaded into the sanctuary. The noise often disturbs the nearby neighbors, eliciting complaints and negative reviews about St. John's church.

In the midst of million dollar homes, supplemental groceries are handed out to neighbors in need—exposing the socioeconomic diversity of the neighborhood. While this exposure reveals the reality of economic disparity to a privileged neighborhood, St. John's church did not realize the exposure might have been at the expense of the integrity of the people served. For St. John's church to be a true third place, having people stand in line was not conducive to third place interactions. The neighbors asked if it was possible for those waiting in line to wait in the sanctuary instead. This request challenged the perception of what a sanctuary was supposed to be used for. While there was not 100

percent clarity on whether or not this was a good idea, St. John's church decided to give it a try. The change in atmosphere was immediately noticeable. There were no fights in line on who was first. People felt as if they were treated with dignity and respected. People were sharing stories and talking with each other instead of being concerned with protecting their place in line. Most of all, both the volunteers and those being served were smiling and happy. St. John's church learned from its neighbors how to respect and treat people with dignity while exposing the issues of food security in the neighborhood. Learning how to love the neighbor while addressing the *han* of the neighbor is the act of *jeong-han*.

The Theology of *Jeong* 정 (Love) towards the Other

The complexity of loving the neighbor can be encompassed in the Korean word *jeong-han* (정 한). If *jeong* encompasses love and *han* holds suffering, then *jeong-han* is the coexistence of these two. Joh describes *jeong-han* as “a release of a long sigh by the person who has experienced *han*.”⁶ Like *han*, *jeong* is difficult to translate. As a concept, *jeong* encompasses but is not limited to notions of compassion, affection, solidarity, relationality, vulnerability, and forgiveness. The word for *jeong*, when written in hanja, is composed primarily of words for heart, vulnerability, and something “arising.”⁷ Joh further explains how *jeong* contains similar characteristics to the Greek words for love, *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. Like *eros*, *jeong* bonds people together, yet *jeong* does not carry romantic or sexual feelings. Like *philia*, *jeong* is relational, yet the relationship does not depend on mutuality in order to flourish. Like *agape*, the Greek word used in the Greatest

⁶ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 22.

⁷ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xiii.

Commandment, *jeong* involves sacrifice and service, but it is not at the detriment of the one sacrificing. “*Jeong* works to restore life in the face of forces that destroy life.”⁸

Jeong saturates daily living and all forms of relationships. If *han* is a wounded heart, then *jeong* “searches for healing the wounds of individuals and collective society.”⁹ In other words, *jeong* makes relationships “sticky.”¹⁰ A good example that exhibits the concept of a *jeong* relationship is the story of Ruth and Naomi. In the Book of Ruth, Naomi is returning from Moab with her two daughters-in-law. She manages to turn one away, but Ruth insists on staying with Naomi. When they return, her old friends greet her asking, “Is this Naomi?” She replies to them, “Don’t call me Naomi (pleasant), but call me Mara (bitter), for the Almighty has made me very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has returned me empty” (Ruth 1:19-21). Naomi is left with nothing. Naomi’s bitterness is warranted. She never expected her life to turn out this way: her husband gone as well as her only two sons. She is a widow, a status of no power and no rights, especially without a male heir to take care of her. There seems to be no hope and her future is unsure. Her life is left in the hands of a Moabite woman, her daughter-in-law.

Both Naomi and Ruth remind me of the many Korean immigrants I grew up with in church as a child. Ruth’s act of *jeong* transformed Naomi from Mara back to Naomi. Naomi was not only returned to her previous name but also given a future. The neighborhood women declared that “a son has been born to Naomi.” “He will restore your life and sustain you in your old age. Your daughter-in-law who loves you has given birth to him. She’s better for you than seven sons” (Ruth 4:15).

⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 147.

⁹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 26.

¹⁰ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xiv.

Ruth as a symbol of the Other shows how the neighbor defines what it means to love the neighbor. The commandment to love the neighbor is not because God simply commands. The commandment to love the neighbor is because that is how to love God, discover what it means to be in a loving relationship, and allow one's faith to be transformed. To love the neighbor is the very identity of God. Love, *jeong*, is the third place that allows people to coexist in the third space of who they are as God created them to be.

Jeong recognizes not only our connectedness but also the dignity and worth of both the self and the other. *Jeong* is able to wedge itself into the smallest gaps between the oppressed and the oppressor. *Jeong* is powerful precisely because it is an emancipatory and healing power, even in relationships that have been reduced to simple binaries . . . *Jeong* has gradations of thinness and thickness, that is, it exhibits weaker and stronger forms of relationality . . . *jeong* emerges in the in-between space created by the juxtaposition of suffering and justice, between death and life.¹¹

Therefore, membership, growth, and financial resources are not the measuring stick for health of a church, but *jeong* is. *Jeong* is the transformative agent of change for the church as well as the believers.

Evans states, "That American tendency toward triumphalism, of optimism rooted in success, money, and privilege, will infect and sap of substance any faith community that has lost its capacity for 'holding space' for those in grief."¹² Church as third place is a holding space or "holding environment" in order for *jeong* and *han* to coexist and work itself out through the interaction with others and possibly lead to transformation. This *jeong-han* work is not easy and yet the church can provide safety and structure for people to "discuss the particular values, perspectives, and creative ideas they have on the

¹¹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 126.

¹² Evans, *Inspired*, 110.

challenging situation they all face.”¹³ Similar to how St. John’s church learned through its neighbors that having people wait in the sanctuary versus outside in line would be more respectful, the sanctuary was a holding environment for that solution to arise as people interacted at the food pantry, a third place, in order to do the *jeong-han* work of serving its neighbors food.

A sanctuary is supposed to be a safe holding environment where people’s lives and faith intersect—no matter what faith background, race, gender, sexuality, and class. By safe, I mean holding environments are intentional spaces where the difficult work can happen. Bolsinger likens holding environments to a Crock-Pot. “Every person is like a hard, raw vegetable or a firm piece of uncooked meat. For the pieces of food to become a meal . . . each bit must be transformed at least a bit.”¹⁴ In other words, people come with their own *son mat* or flavor. It takes a while for every one to taste the *son mat* of the Other, familiarize themselves with the taste, and work together to marry and re-create a flavor that reflects everyone. In order to do so, the temperature of the holding environment must be regulated. “If the temperature gets too high, the meal gets burned; too low and even though a long time has gone by, all you have is hard vegetables and raw meat.”¹⁵ Whether strangers, neighbors, or friends, the diversity of presence helps reconceptualize what it means to be a Christian. Creating this kind of space requires all to give up and let go of what they know to be true and believe. However, this is what the church is meant to be.

¹³ Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Kindle Location 2692.

¹⁴ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 140.

¹⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 140.

Using Law's inclusive boundary function as a holding environment framework is helpful in creating a third place where diversity can thrive and the heat of the *jeong-han* work can be regulated. The outer perimeter, the fear zone, can be re-imagined as a space where feelings of *han* are most prevalent. People can retreat or naturally find themselves retreating to the outer perimeter as they experience loss and grief associated with their own values and identity. It is important to not remain too long as the place where *han* is prevalent can be isolating and lonely—possibly leading to separating and breaking relationships. Within the grace margin is the safe zone or where *jeong* is most prevalent. However, unlike, the safe zone, it is not a space where one retreats to alone. Rather, it is a place where those whose relationships exhibit the most *jeong* exist. It is important to not remain in this zone too long as the safety and belonging felt may prevent needed transformation to blossom. The grace margin is where *jeong-han* coexists. It is the third space—in-between *han* and *jeong*. *Han-pu-ri*, covenant building, experimenting, and playfulness are used to demonstrate the main act of “loving the neighbor” and “loving the self.”

Neither zone is either exclusively bad or good, but represents the range of behavior and feelings that arise as people do *jeong-han* work. The soft border represents the fluid movement between *han* and *jeong*. As individuals and the collective group change and transform, the respective areas of *han*, *jeong*, and *jeong-han* can expand or retract—depending on the adaptive challenge being addressed.

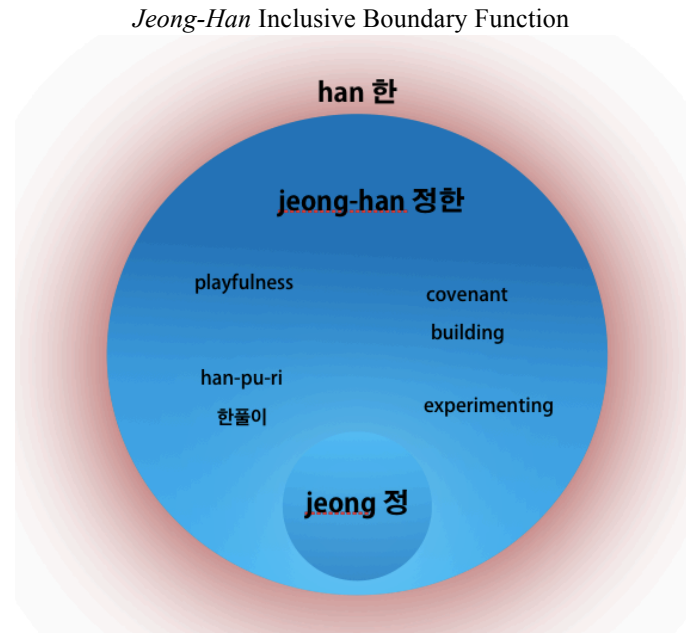


Figure 2. Eric Law’s Inclusive Boundary Function using the terms *jeong* for safe zone, *han* for fear zone, and *jeong-han* for grace margin.

Korean concepts always hold opposites in balance with each other—water and fire, *han* and *jeong*, and neighbor and self. Third place theology is rooted holding this difference in balance. Third place theology requires both individuals and communities to explore their third space identity of living in the in-between so that individuals and communities can identify their own *han* and need for *han-pu-ri* as well as identify ways they may be vessels of *han* and places for *han-pu-ri*. If being a Christian is “to love the neighbor,” then it is the neighbor that will teach the church how to love. If the church is to be places of transformation, then the church needs to create space for all to do what is necessary to exist as a third place—giving permission for those to weave in and out of *jeong* and *han* as the *jeong-han* work is being done.

PART 3
MINISTRY PRACTICE
WIND/SPIRIT 숨 (*SOOM*)

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTION AND ASSESSMENT ON PAST MINISTRY CHANGES

The Intersection of Pastor and Mother

If adaptive change work requires a lot from the church, it requires just as much from the person or persons leading the adaptive work. Leadership requires the ability to hold space for people to engage in adaptive work as well as the capacity to navigate through the various emotions that change elicits.¹ “Leadership is an improvisational art.”² A leader must be able to hold an overarching vision or strategic plan without every moment being scripted and laid out. The task of a leader is therefore taxing and exhausting—sometimes leading to self-destructive acts. Asking self-reflective questions such as, “Who’s holding you; who’s holding the holder? When you are completely exhausted from being the containing vessel, who will provide you with a place to meet your need for intimacy and release?” can help a leader assess one’s emotional and spiritual health.³ Not letting the adaptive change work rob a leader of their wonder, curiosity, and innocence during difficult moments means being able to remain receptive

¹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 18.

² Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 73.

³ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 177.

and open to “the full range of emotions without going numb, striking back, or engaging in some other defense.”⁴

Truthfully, I did not go to seminary to become a pastor. I went because I wanted to learn what the Bible had to say about the many burning questions I could not find answer for in my evangelical upbringing. Even when I began working at St. John’s church, I accepted the call because the job description fit my skill set. I was not prepared for the journey of how my identity and sense of call would be intertwined with the changing identity of St. John’s church.

Many congregants at St. John’s church never had a female pastor before. Many congregants never had a pregnant pastor before. In my first year, I was pregnant with my first child. While my black clergy robe hid my expanding waistline, it could not hide all the symptoms of pregnancy. When my son was born, life as a pastor and a mother was not easy. Because my husband was a pastor at a different church and other family members lived far away, I did not have the option of having my son cared for by others while I worked. Even if that was not so, my son had extreme separation anxiety. This made it difficult to put him in the nursery during worship. I often preached with him in a sling. I took him to every meeting, bible study, and church gathering.

Katherine Willis Pershey shares her experience as a pastor who had to balance ministry, marriage, and motherhood. After she had her first child, she asked herself, “Will they still let me be their pastor?”⁵ I asked this same question every time I disciplined my toddler son in the middle of a sermon; forgot what I was saying due to sleep deprivation;

⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 227-228.

⁵ Katherine Willis Pershey, *Any Day a Beautiful Change: A Story of Faith and Family* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2012), 6.

or had to cancel a meeting because my son was sick. While watching me pastor and mother pushed some out of their comfort zone of what a pastor should embody, many embraced me as both pastor and mother and gave me a safe space to figure out how to be both. Especially for parents, I became an ally and a co-journeyer on this parenting roller coaster. Watching me openly struggle with my son created a safe space for parents with young children to worship together without feeling sensitive to the noises and disruptions made. At the time, St. John's church did not have many young families with children, but many families visited and did not return. Being a pastor and a mother opened my eyes to ways St. John's church could be more hospitable to families worshipping. My changing identity as a pastor and a mother gave me the capacity to see the changes and challenges of worshipping at St. John's church.

Becoming an Intergenerational Community

As I become more aware of the changes happening in my pastoral identity, my adaptive capacity to lead St. John's church in its own transformation of communal identity increases. The mutual journey of my pastoral identity and the communal identity of St. John's church is a series of incremental steps leading to becoming a third place that is congruent with who we are becoming. James Osterhaus says, "Adaptive leadership for the pastor involves creating an environment in which the congregation can wrestle with the competing values and implications associated with a problem."⁶ Changing the way St. John's church worshipped to welcome children was a significant change that challenged the identity of the church. Because I went through my own growth in who I was as a pastor and a mother, St. John's church could embrace the DNA of its past in a new way

⁶ Osterhaus, Jurkowski, and Hahn, *Thriving through Ministry*, 126.

with a new identity—not as a church trying to bring in children in order to have big programs and larger numbers, but as an expression of being a third place for families. The adaptive challenge was becoming a healthy adaptation of their DNA—not trying to embrace an old homogeneous large church identity, but instead adapting to be a healthy welcoming third place for people and families in a diverse city. The church must embrace its limitations in order to be liberated to move forward congruently to who we are.

Phil Hansen, an artist, fell in love with pointillism at a very young age—making images by creating a series of very fine dots.⁷ His love for this kind of art caused him to develop a shake in his hand and permanent nerve damage. Devastated he went to a doctor who asked, “Why don’t you embrace your limitations, embrace the shake?” This invitation to embrace his limitations freed him from seeing art in a singular way. No more confined, he was free to think outside the box. However, he was paralyzed by the choices he never had before. Hansen wondered if in order to regain his creativity, he had to stop stepping outside the box, but get back in it.

Hansen would put imaginary limitations upon himself. What if there were no paintbrushes in the world? He then painted a picture of Bruce Lee by dipping his hands in black paint and karate chopping the canvas. Hansen found the ultimate creativity in “good-bye art.” After he finished creating a piece of art, he would destroy it—sending him back to a neutral place where he felt refreshed and ready to start the next project. As each piece of art was destroyed, he learned how to let go of outcomes, failures, and imperfections. He also discovered that limitations are universal. Everyone has limitations.

⁷ Phil Hansen, *Tattoo a Banana and Other Ways to Turn Anything and Everything into Art* (New York: A Perigee Book, 2012), 5.

St. John’s church is affected by the nature of San Francisco. St. John’s church is limited in offering traditional programming that is used to grow a church because families decide whether or not to stay in the city depending on what school their child is assigned in the school lottery—where the city chooses the school and not based on where a family is zoned. St. John’s church is limited in maintaining stable membership that is needed in providing steady leadership and volunteers because with so many employed by start-ups, the population of San Francisco fluctuates every three to five years. Also, over ninety percent of San Francisco rents because affordable housing is limited. St. John’s church is limited in finding adequate meeting times for Bible studies, outreach opportunities, and committee meetings because every Sunday is filled with a festival or a marathon. These events make it difficult for people to come to church due to street closures. The nature of the city makes it difficult for people to build relationships, find connection, and feel settled. People are hesitant to begin relationships when it is uncertain how long a person will stay in the city—leaving people to feel lonely and isolated. By embracing its limitations, St John’s church instead adapted its DNA by rethinking its method of nurturing people in their faith while existing in a busy transient city.

Limitations of the Inclusive Boundary Function of St. John’s Church

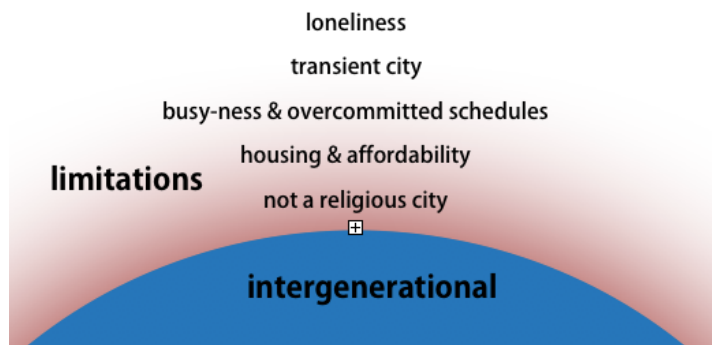


Figure 3. The fear zone is labeled as the limitations St. John’s church faces in becoming an intergenerational church.

By embracing the limitations of size, attendance, and volunteers, all programs such as youth group, bible study, outreach events, and Sunday School were eliminated. If one hour on Sunday morning was all the time people had in their busy lives to attend, then that one hour had to be an opportunity for worship, bible study, relationship building, and spiritual growth. Worship had to be a one-room schoolhouse—generations mutually serving, sharing, and learning from each other.

By embracing the limitations of staff and financial resources, the structure and system had to be flexible and fluid. By not spending time on programming, staff had more time to thoughtfully engage on the direction of the church and finances were not wasted on supporting programs that were low in attendance and effectiveness. Like Hansen, embracing limitations gave opportunity to face fears head on, demystify assumptions, and discover freedom in possibilities. The next challenge was figuring out how to become an intergenerational faith community.

Why Children Should Be in Worship

In an intergenerational church, the spiritual practice of permission, spontaneity, and change becomes the main activity in the grace margin, the *jeong-han*. They are needed ingredients for existing as a third place. If St. John's church was to become a third place for families, then St. John's church had to clarify why children should be in worship. Being an intergenerational church is less about what is done and more about how a church behaves. Being an intergenerational church is a spiritual discipline—as it requires a person to look beyond his or her own needs and towards another person's needs. Being an intergenerational church nurtures the ability to provide hospitality to others. Children in worship challenge everyone to examine how others engage in worship

and with each other. There is no right way or one way to worship. Children are reminders of how God is present in the messy-ness of life. The noises and messy-ness of children are opportunities to reexamine the meaning of sacred and holy—providing moments to exercise patience, grace, love, forgiveness, and generosity.⁸

As children grow older, there is no guarantee that children will continue to participate in church. Therefore, it is important to make every moment count while they are present in church. Children in worship remind the church of their baptismal vows to each child when he or she was baptized. If the children are required to attend Sunday School during worship or remain silent during worship, how will children know what it means to be full participants in the church? “Having been welcomed with water, a child who is invited to really participate in a congregation’s life and worship is much more likely to be willingly confirmed into a continuing yet transforming relationship with the household of faith.”⁹ Intergenerational worship involves the heart as well as the head and broadens acceptance of those who are different. All that is required in an intergenerational church is for people to come as they are because intergenerational worship mirrors the complex, diverse, and beautiful image of God and God’s creation.

The framework used to move towards an intergenerational church encompassed five components: setting and increasing the *jeong-han* boundaries, creating a spiritual discipline of playfulness and improv, experimenting with measured changes, and assessing and observing response and effect of experiments. These five components were

⁸ Theresa Cho, “Reinventing the One-Room Worship House,” in *Church on Purpose: Reinventing, Discipleship, Community, and Justice*, eds. Adam L. Bond and Laura Mariko Cheifetz (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2015), 70.

⁹ Elizabeth Francis Caldwell, *Come to Me: Rethinking the Sacraments for Children* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996), 35.

stimulated by and mirrored my own journey as a pastor and a mother. I, too, had to set and increase my *jeong-han* boundary that balanced exposing my kids to a faith community and protecting their space and privacy from other people's expectations. I had to cultivate a spiritual discipline of playfulness and improv as I navigated the uncharted territory of first-time mother and pastor. I had to experiment with measured changes of how I would simultaneously work as a pastor and a mother and when I would need to carve out my own time as only a mother or only a pastor. All along the way, I am assessing my adaptive capacity to be a pastor and a mother and observing my needs as well as the responses from my congregation as our adaptive journeys paralleled one another in growth, change, and transformation.

Cory Siebel labels these in ordered steps as awareness, understanding, evaluation, experimentation, and commitment. Awareness is creating a listening space for the church to develop awareness of what is happening to them and among them.¹⁰ Understanding is engaging in intentional conversations in order to grasp on a deeper level the issues the church faces.¹¹ The church then examines current behaviors, programs, and commitments to see if they are in line with their new understanding.¹² Now the church is ready to begin experimenting and committing to changes that truly are transformational for the church and its people.¹³ The framework I propose does not have a linear order such as this, but within each component there is a level of awareness, understanding, evaluation, experimentation, and commitment needed. Some are able to build awareness and

¹⁰ Siebel, "From Multigenerational to Intergenerational," in *Intergenerate*, 91.

¹¹ Siebel, "From Multigenerational to Intergenerational," in *Intergenerate*, 92.

¹² Siebel, "From Multigenerational to Intergenerational," in *Intergenerate*, 93.

¹³ Siebel, "From Multigenerational to Intergenerational," in *Intergenerate*, 93.

understanding before they move into action. Others need to act and do in order to build awareness and understanding. The grace margin allows for understanding and awareness to exist as people learn at their own pace, make mistakes, and try again.

Setting and Increasing the *Jeong-Han* Boundaries

I can only go a few days without kimchi—maybe a week, but then my body begins to crave it. Kimchi is a staple Korean dish. In the fermentation process, it takes up to three days to notice any change. In the Korean church where I grew up, my mother and the other church ladies would make kimchi—gathering around huge bins of napa cabbage and salting each leaf in order to jumpstart the process. This was also a time for them to share news, stories, and prayers. Once the cabbage had absorbed some of the salt and wilted, they meticulously rubbed each leaf with red pepper spices. Then they packed them in glass jars so the cabbage could ferment and transform into kimchi.¹⁴ When storing kimchi in jars, my mother would always leave a buffer space between the kimchi and the lid in order to leave room for fermentation to take place.

Leaving a little room so change can take place is also required in the transformation of people and the transformation of a church. The space allows the fermentation that brings it alive to occur. People in the church can have the awareness and understanding for the need for change, but are paralyzed, not knowing what to change, how to change, and unsure of what the change will bring. This can lead to limiting the space and securing the boundaries with “It’s never been done that way before” or “Our policy does not allow it.” However, if there is permissive space to try something, experiment, and explore, then transformation has room to take place.

¹⁴ Theresa Cho, “May 17, Ascension Sunday: Luke 24:44-53,” *Christian Century*, May 2015, 2015, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2015-04/may-17-ascension-sunday>.

One example of this kind of space is found in the work of Keri Smith, an illustrator who created “Wreck This Journal”. “Wreck this Journal” is indeed a journal, but it is a journal that is not filled with words and kept secret, but instead intentionally used by encouraging people to engage in “destructive” acts such as poking holes through pages, coloring outside the lines, and painting with coffee. Smith says people are often critical of their work or their commitment to finish what they started. The journal is intended for those who have a difficult time starting, keeping, and finishing a journal. The journal gives permission for people to fail and mess up in order to enter into the creative process without judgment. Acknowledging that the journal may be difficult for many, Smith posts a warning in her book: “Warning: during this process of this book you will get dirty. You may find yourself covered in paint, or any other number of foreign substances. You will get wet. You may be asked to do things you question. You may grieve for the perfect state that you found the book in. You may begin to see creative destruction everywhere. You may begin to live more recklessly.”¹⁵

My ten-year-old son discovered this journal and suggested we do it together. Within a week, my son’s journal was successfully wrecked—pages bent, cover torn, and edges stuck together. He noticed my journal sat on the coffee table in perfectly new condition. Throughout the week, he would ask me when I was going to start wrecking my journal. I gave excuse after excuse about how busy I was when the truth was I could not figure out how to perfectly wreck my journal. I realized how unfair it was for me to ask people in my congregation to accept changes when I could not even wreck a journal. On the first page, it reads, “Crack the spine.” As hard as it was to break a perfectly stiff spine of a book, I did it. I cracked it and grieved for the perfect state the journal used to be in.

¹⁵ Kerri Smith, *Wreck This Journal* (New York: A Perigee Book, 2007).

The journal gave me an idea—a starting point. I needed to find the spine of St. John’s church, and like most churches, that spine ran right down the center of worship. A small team was formed to assess worship service through the eyes of a first-time visitor. They took notes on observations that would make a first-time visitor feel out of place or uncomfortable, using the following questions as a guide:

- How do people worship? When do they weave in and weave out?
- Who is entering into worship? What invites them? What are obstacles?
- What is sacred?
- What are potential opportunities for change?
- What surprised you in worship?
- What seemed challenging in worship?
- What could be done better?
- What works well?

Through those observations, simple things were changed first—the location of the coffee and fellowship hour from the back of the church to the front entrance so that it would be easier to welcome visitors as they left the building; the location of the nursery that used to be located downstairs away from the sanctuary moved adjacent so that parents could retrieve their child quickly if need be. Liturgy and bulletin were simplified so that no one felt left out if they were not familiar with the Lord’s Prayer, doxology, or other rituals that regular attendees would have memorized. Some pews and sanctuary furniture were removed to make space for those who needed to use a walker, wheelchair, or stroller. All these incremental changes increased the capacity of St. John’s church to be a more inclusive, diverse, intergenerational community by leaving space for change to happen. These may have been technical changes, but they were necessary to change behavior and attitude of the congregation towards all ages. Each technical change was a practical and tangible exercise in letting go, discovering anew, and believing it is possible to exist as a church in a new way. Moving pews and the location of the nursery loosened the bolts of

their stubbornness that things always had to be done the way it was done before.

Simplifying programming and liturgy released the pressure of doing more than what was possible or needed.

In conjunction with changing physical space, St. John's church needed to change the spiritual space as well—changing the hearts and minds of the people. I adapted a “Wreck This Journal” for St. John's church in order to engage their *jeong-han*. Using *lectio divina* in worship, worshippers were invited to read and meditate on Ephesians 3:16-21 and circle words or phrases that caught their attention. I collected these key words and used them to make suggestions of a “destructive” act associated with each word. By engaging in “destructive” acts as small changes were being made in worship, I hoped people's capacity to let go would increase. Some of the suggestions were:

- riches - give away your favorite page.
- faith - climb up high and drop this journal.
- love - color this entire page in your favorite color.
- width - draw fat lines and thin.
- beyond - tie a string to the spine of this book. Swing wildly.
- height - use this page to make a paper airplane.
- imagine - scribble wildly, violently, with reckless abandon.
- breadth - draw a circle. Color outside the lines.
- possibilities - write a list of more ways to wreck this journal.
- suSTAIN - pour, spill, drip, spit, fling your coffee here.
- roots - press leaves and other found things.
- glory - leave this page blank on purpose.

As St. John's church continued to worship intergenerationally, congregants became more tolerant and welcoming towards children in worship—realizing their own needs and lives were not much different. While children were “wrecking” the church, the adults realized how much they craved creative ways to interact with scripture, movement during worship, and tolerance of their own emotional, spiritual, and physical needs. It was not easy, but changes in behavior were happening. St. John's church worked hard to

be permissive of toddlers and babies moving about the sanctuary during worship as well as older adults who moved about in walkers and wheelchairs. As the toddlers and babies grew older, they continued to enjoy such freedom. It became clear that toddlers running around the sanctuary and older kids running around the sanctuary posed different challenges. The safety of older adults with mobility issues felt unsafe, as they feared being knocked down. To address issues such as this, a covenant was established for the wider church community, the parents, and the children that balanced the competing identities of being open and flexible with the awareness of people's comfort and safety.

For the St. John's church:

- I recognize being a part of an intergenerational church means there are times I must exercise grace, patience, and nurturing love.
- If the noises of children make it difficult for me to participate at my comfort level, I will choose to move to an area in the sanctuary that is less distracting.
- I will model how to worship in an intergenerational church by doing my part to provide a safe, open, real, and welcoming atmosphere.
- If I have any thoughts, concerns, and/or ideas, I will express those to the pastors or elders.

For parents and families:

- As a parent, I will worship as a family and model for my children how to worship, such as reading prayers together, singing together, and engaging in prayer activities together.
- As a parent of a child in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade, I will review the children's covenant with them about how to be respectful in worship.
- If I have any thoughts, concerns, and/or ideas, I will express those to the pastors and elders.

For children in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade: Because I am old enough and an example to younger kids, I promise the following,

- While in Sunday lessons, I will listen to the teacher, engage in the story and activity, and respect the space and materials.
- If I choose not to participate in Sunday lessons, I may sit with my family in worship and not distract others by wandering around church grounds.

- While in worship, I will sit quietly, participate in worship, or do a quiet age-appropriate activity (like coloring or reading) so that those around me may have a comfortable worship experience.

It is challenging to be an intergenerational church, but with the right boundaries and agreed-upon covenant, it is extremely rewarding. Covenants are not uncommon. God made many covenants with God's people whenever their relationship required a new understanding of being together. A covenant needs to be clear of its intentions; referred to frequently so all understand what is expected; and how the community will be held accountable. This particular covenant was not a "children shall be seen and not heard" policy, but rather guidelines that gave permission for all to express themselves in worship, in church, in faith, and to each other that is respectful, welcoming, and caring. The pastors and the leaders of St. John's church modeled the intentions of the covenant by expressing a welcoming presence whenever a child cried or moved around. The covenant was sent to all the parents at least twice a year and read to the children in every Sunday School class until the covenant was embedded into the covenant memory of the church. Eventually, the covenant did not need to be read or referred to as frequently because it was being lived out every moment and communicated through the actions of the people of St. John's church.

Creating a Spiritual Discipline of Playfulness and Improv

An established covenant is the expressed identity of the church as it lives into the adaptive changes and *jeong-han* work in becoming a third place for families. With an established covenant, the covenant could be put into practice so that people might feel safer to move out of their comfort zone and enter into a playful mindset. "Play" is necessary in an intergenerational church. Children present in worship give many

opportunities for spontaneous moments to occur. These spontaneous moments sometimes are gifts of the Holy Spirit as God's presence is revealed in revelatory ways. A toddler once walked up to the communion table and reached up to grab the cup of grape juice—accidentally tipping it and pouring it over his head. The moment was a reminder of the connection of baptism and the Lord's Supper to a collective understanding of who Jesus is. It was an opportunity to practice the covenant promise to extend grace and patience to children and communicate to parents that children are truly welcomed. A child danced in the middle of a hymn—a reminder that praising God is a full body event. It was an opportunity to practice the covenant promise of modeling worship and that all expressions of faith are acceptable and worthy.

Spontaneous moments are what Tina Fey calls “happy accidents.” In the same way that a sense of trust and safety is central to *jeong-han* work, happy accidents built on these spontaneous moments of trust and love further a person's and a community's capacity to cultivate a culture built on trust and love. If we can trust and love one another “on the map,” then we are more likely able to trust and love one another “off the map.”¹⁶ In other words, if we can learn to trust and love one another in spontaneous moments that happen in a holding environment such as worship, we are more likely able to trust and love one another outside the sanctuary when things out of our control happen every day.

Similarly, developing the skill of improv is a helpful skill in strengthening adaptive change abilities not only in the church, but in life as well. “In improv, there are no mistakes, only beautiful happy accidents. And many of the worlds' greatest

¹⁶ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 14-15.

discoveries have been by accident.”¹⁷ Fey says there are four main rules to improv.¹⁸ The first rule is “always agree and say yes.” This requires a person to agree with whatever the other has created—respecting their choice and keeping an open mind. The first rule sets the starting place. The second rule is to “say yes, and.” A partner is to say yes, but also contribute and add something to the discussion. This leads to the third rule—“make statements.” Fey says it is important to not just raise questions and point out obstacles, but be a part of the solution and problem-solving. Lastly, no matter what is created, there are no mistakes, but only opportunities. There is no judgment in what was created, but only what opportunities were made available. Everything that happens in church or worship does not have to lead to a measurable outcome. However, there should be opportunities to grow in faith, build relationships, and expand our imagination on what is possible.

For us, worship became an improv of growing *jeong-han*. It slowly became a place where people could practice hospitality, experiment multiple ways of exercising grace, love, and forgiveness and explore the many dimensions of being in relationships of accountability. These opportunities of practice required a worship environment that is open to exploration, authentic to the needs of people, and safe for them to try something new and make mistakes. This meant that the sanctuary of St. John’s church needed to be a laboratory where such experiments could safely take place.

¹⁷ Tina Fey, *Bossypants* (New York: Reagan Arthur Books, 2011), 77.

¹⁸ Fey, *Bossypants*, 76-77.

Experimenting with Measured Changes

Similar to other fermented foods, the longer the kimchi is allowed to ripen, the stronger the aroma. Just when you think the kimchi is going bad, it is only getting better. There is no such thing as bad kimchi. When the kimchi is too sour to eat, most make kimchi jjigae, 김치찌개, a spicy kimchi stew. Change too can be pungent as time progresses. Embracing change can be difficult when it evokes a visceral reaction, but an adaptive leader learns to work with people to overcome their visceral reactions and “taste and see”—testing and learning what may be happening in order to help us discover something new.

In San Francisco, Gever Tulley created Tinkering School, a place where children are given opportunity to create and make things. Tulley observed how children today live in an overprotected environment that prevents them to explore and judge risk for themselves. At Tinkering School, Tulley aims to nurture competence in children. “A competent person will examine the context of the problem, look at the tools and raw materials, and begin postulating possible solutions, performing small experiments that test the critical aspects of their postulate and start forming a working solution. Competent people overcome setbacks and treat failures as feedback, which they incorporate in the ongoing, evolving solution to the problem.”¹⁹ In his book, *50 Dangerous Things*, Tulley suggests fifty activities children are no longer encouraged to do—activities such as, licking a 9-volt battery, looking at the sun, and walking around blindfolded. Each activity contains an element of risk, but is introduced through measured observation. With each

¹⁹ Gever Tulley and Julie Spiegel, *50 Dangerous Things: You Should Let Your Children Do* (New York: New American Library, 2009), xiv-xv.

activity, there is a blank page for field notes to list observations, suggested improvements, and new ideas.

While St. John's church did not list fifty things, they did leave room for fifty things to naturally unfold and be revealed. When the thread of change is pulled, one thing tends to unravel another. In other words, one change leads to another. Each change is an opportunity to rename limitations, build a spiritual practice, experiment on new processes, and observe the outcome of those changes. Some of the fifty things St. John's church experimented were:

1. *Prayer stations*: an interactive way for worshippers to engage in scripture with all the senses. Risk Involved: 1) the comfort level of worshippers to move around freely during worship; 2) a new prayer practice that was unfamiliar. Field Notes: 1) Include remaining seated in the pews and listening to contemplative music as a prayer station so that those who do not want to participate still feel included; 2) Make instructions simple and accessible for all ages; 3) Designing prayer stations to be intergenerational gives parents, children, and those new to Christian faith opportunities to teach and learn together.
2. *Simplify Focus of St. John's*²⁰: Say no to everything. This means eliminating programs and not starting new programs. Risk Involved: 1) offending people wanting and leading these programs; 2) decreased morale of church members who feel the church is not doing what the church should be doing. Field Notes: 1) People leading these programs were exhausted. The needed break was an opportunity for them to reflect on how they want to engage in the life of the church that was life-giving; 2) Accepting the limitations of St. John's church boosted morale. There was more energy to focus on areas of the church that were meaningful and vibrant; 3) Options were added instead of programs, allowing people the freedom to choose.²¹
3. *Change session meetings*: Reduce the number of committees to three main foci (fellowship, pastoral care, and mission) and make session meetings into working meetings. Change the time of session meetings from evening to Sunday after worship. Allow couples to occupy a single leadership seat. Risk Involved: 1) not following Book of Order guidelines. Field Notes: 1)

²⁰ Thom S. Rainer, *Simple Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), Kindle Locations 3172-3175.

²¹ Rainer, *Simple Church*, Kindle location 2888.

Committees were not effective and often consisted of one elder. Reducing the number allowed more elders to divide up into committees; 2) Everyone is busy and often did not convene outside of session meetings. Giving time to meet and work during the session meeting gave opportunities to collaborate and network; 3) Changing the time of meeting and allowing couples to occupy one leadership seat made it possible for parents of small children and senior adults to be in a leadership role. They could take turns depending on who was available. This was a systemic change of inclusivity for the whole church.

4. *New pews*: Replace historic, 100-year-old pews. The pews were falling apart, bulky, and heavy to move. Given multiple uses of the sanctuary, flexible seating was required to accommodate the Saturday food pantry, creative worship services, more space for strollers and walkers, and weddings. Risk Involved: 1) people's nostalgic attachment to the old pews; 2) a pew style that was sturdy enough for children and comfortable enough for senior adults; 3) the expense. Field Notes: 1) Spent considerable amount of time addressing nostalgia in the church and identifying past significant changes such as the removal of the stone baptismal font in the 1960s. This de-escalated the tension people felt that the historicity of St. John's church was in jeopardy; 2) Different pew styles were brought in for people to examine and test. Feedback was received and shared with the church; 3) A London company specializing in stackable pews was chosen — designed for historic churches needing flexible seating options. The expertise of this company also increased confidence in the church that this was a worthy investment.
5. *Co-pastor*: Changing the pastoral staff from associate pastor and head of staff to co-pastors models collaborative partnership without hierarchy — modeling egalitarian approach in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. Risk Involved: 1) People who do not want a female, racial ethnic pastor as a co-pastor may leave; 2) The expense of two full-time pastors is a financial burden for a small church; 3) The change in power dynamics and potential conflict between two pastors who work well together. Field Notes: 1) While there were people who left, many remained and were rejuvenated by the increased energy and joy of a collaborative partnership; 2) A financial plan of a 5-year incremental increase of the associate pastor's salary to be on par with the former head of staff was set; 3) For one year, co-pastors were to meet with a professional colleague to discuss transitions, conflicts and other concerns.

Each change was an opportunity for St. John's church to face limitations, name fears, and reexamine what it means to be a faith community. Each change was an opportunity for St. John's church to reexamine their DNA and false assumptions about who they thought they were—realizing they are not the same big church from the hey

days, nor do they desire to be that kind of church anymore. As a small urban church, there were things they were able to do that were easier for a smaller church than a larger church: building relationships, making quick changes, and interacting creatively in worship. Therefore, each person had to also face their own limitations, name their own fears, and reexamine what it means for them to be a part of a faith community. What St. John’s church discovered is “we are good enough.” In the grace margin, our size is good enough. God calls us good enough.

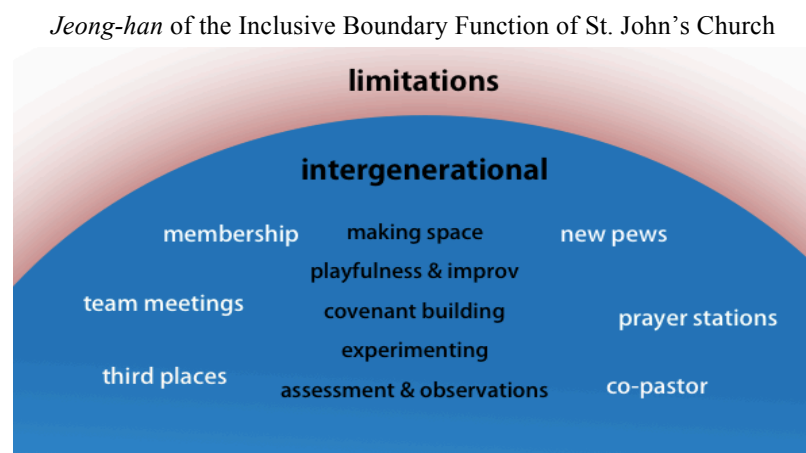


Figure 4. The grace margin is labeled as the *jeong-han* work done to become an intergenerational church.

Assessing and Observing Response and Effect of Experiments

With each experiment, field notes were taken on observations and possible improvements. More than that, the practice of assessment and observation was embedded into the function of the staff, leaders, and church members. Moving back and forth from the “balcony to the dance floor” is important to a church’s health—continuously assessing what is happening and taking corrective action midcourse.²² When I am not preaching, I sit in the back of the congregation to observe worship—taking notes on how people interact with one another, engage with liturgy, and move around the sanctuary.

²² Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Kindle location 289.

Leadership is trained to assess as well, receive feedback, and discover new ideas depending on people's interest and needs. Monthly leadership meetings are opportunities to share observations and lessons learned in order to know what to tweak. There is also flexibility to tweak in the moment—knowing that things do not always go as planned. As a pastor, I have also built trust equity with St. John's church. There are moments when the experiment may not be understood or uncomfortable, but they trust me and therefore are willing to try. They trust that I will hear their feedback, change midcourse if need be, or know there is a reason I am staying on course.

Managing the Grief of Changing Personal and Pastoral Identity

Somewhere along the way, as St. John's church was changing, I did not consider how my own sense of call was changing as well as my own sense of identity. The intergenerational journey led St. John's church to consider changing my call as associate pastor to co-pastor—thus awakening the sleeping giant of anxiety, angst, and insecurity inside me. As St. John's church was exploring this new idea, I left for a sabbatical. Sabbatical gave me space to identify my emotional and spiritual health. I realized I was in the midst of a mid-life crisis. In fact, I probably had been for the past five years without knowing it. There was no event or defining reason for it. St. John's church was doing well. My family life was fine. I had many supportive friends and co-workers. I was simply unhappy. When considering becoming a co-pastor, I was faced with uncertainty. My friends and colleagues suggested I apply to other churches as discernment on whether I wanted to remain. However, I had yet to answer the question of whether I felt called to be a pastor in the first place. This question was the root of my unhappiness.

Like St. John’s church, I had to create my own *jeong-han* space to safely explore this question. I did not know where to begin. I needed to find the spine to crack and begin this journey. Seeing a spiritual director was a good first step—a non-judgmental person who was there to listen to me. I did not have to make sense, know anything, or hold it all together. I could be incoherent, incompetent, sad, angry, and useless. This space helped me uncover myths I had about myself and discover my passions. I discovered that I was unknowingly comparing myself to Rev. Anderson—not him personally, but my image of a white male pastor. Rev. Anderson and I are very different. We preach differently. He preaches from the news headlines. I preach from personal stories. We engage with people differently. He is a temperate listener. I listen boisterously. We operate the church differently. He is passive and reserved in his leadership. I am more aggressive and forthright. I was unhappy because I was not myself. I am not a white male pastor. I knew that in my mind, but not in my heart. The Korean word for mind and heart is the same word, *ma um*, 마음. There is no distinction between the two words. However, I needed to do intentional work to bridge what I knew in my mind and the emptiness in my heart.

Creating a Rule of Life

Over time, I crafted a rule of life or my version of “fifty dangerous things.” Saint Benedict says everyone follows an unwritten rule of life that influences his or her rhythm of life—waking up, eating time, and resting time. Benedict encourages people to let go of their unwritten rule of life and create one that match more closely to the *ma um* of God.²³ A rule of life is activities formed around five major priorities of life: spiritual, relational,

²³ Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), Kindle location 138.

physical, material and missional.²⁴ Following a rule of life creates space to clarify deepest values, important relationships, hopes and dreams, and meaningful work.²⁵ Following a rule of life bridges the gap between the mind and heart, *ma um*.

As a first practice in my Rule, I began running again. When I first began running, I was actually running away. Because I could not grasp the fatigue and burnout I was experiencing, my body wanted to run. I am not sure what I was running away from, except that as my feet hit the pavement, I chanted, “I am going to be okay.” I repeated this to myself over and over again as if I was trying to convince myself that I was truly going to be okay. As months went by, my running mantra would shorten to “I am going to be.” I did not have an idea what that was, but for the present moment I was satisfied with just being. After a few more weeks, it shortened to “I am going,” dreaming of all the possibilities. Eventually, my mantra simply became “I am.” Sometimes “I am” referred to God—the same God that appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Mostly, “I am” meant “I am good enough”—a mantra that St. John’s embraced long before I was able to.

As a second practice in my Rule, I volunteer as a baby cuddler at a hospital once a week. The infants I hold are usually listed as high priority because they have no family support. The one-hour I hold an infant could be the only hour that infant experiences a non-medical touch. Whether in my family or in ministry, children have always been a part of who I am as a mother, a former teacher of children with autism, and as a pastor who works closely with families. As I wade through the uncertainty of where God calls me, the tangible touch of holding a baby has made the abstract adaptive challenge more concrete. As a spiritual practice, I sit in silence holding a baby, much like a silent retreat.

²⁴ Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, Kindle locations 2208-2210.

²⁵ Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, Kindle locations 128-130.

Because most of the infants are post-surgery and connected to many monitors, I have to sit very still—practicing the gift of presence. I cannot heal the infant, but I can be present with the infant in pain, healing, joy, and sorrow. Just like the pain, healing, joy, and sorrow I hold in my own identity, sometimes there is nothing to do to “fix” it. I only need to be present and still. That is enough. The same applies to the adaptive journey St. John’s church goes through. Grief, anger, sorrow, and pain may come forth, but if I have the capacity to be present and stay with them through the hard times, the trust equity I have with them increases.

My next practice is baking. Baking combines measured and methodical technique with unexpected outcomes. A good result depends upon accurate measurements; the correct temperature; a honed skill in kneading, frosting, and mixing; and sometimes luck. However, even with good effort, the intended outcome can be a miss. Nothing is more frustrating than kneading dough, waiting for it to prove, and then hoping for the best when it comes out of the oven. When the intended result comes to realization, it is the most satisfying and glorious feeling. It is equally heart wrenching when the opposite happens. Resisting the urge to throw it out is difficult. Allowing time to grieve the outcome can lead to re-imagine the dough into something else like breadsticks. It is not the same, but it is still delicious.

My last practice has been a challenging, eye-opening, and fulfilling experience. I have been taking Korean language classes. While I first enrolled to assist my daughter in her Korean homework, I discovered an opportunity to reprioritize my life; address insecurities and shadows; and reframe my relationship with my mother. In order to become fluent in any language, the learner has to be immersed in the language as much

as possible. No matter how busy my day is, I had to restructure my day so that it became a discipline to daily listen to the Korean language, whether listening to Korean music in the car, a Korean language podcast while running, or watching a Korean program. Even though I may not completely understand everything, daily listening familiarizes me to the intonations and fluctuations of the pronunciation.

Learning the Korean language also reframes my perspective and broadens my understanding of my parents' immigrant experience. Language is vital to communication. An inability to fully communicate with someone inhibits a person from fully expressing him or herself. Just like any language, there are Korean words that are not sufficiently translated into the English language. Subtleties and nuances of the language go missing. I also gained insight on how my own thoughts form. A big insecurity is being inarticulate. My thoughts feel jumbled and out of order and it takes time to unscramble them. The Korean language is much the same. The sentence structure is reverse to that of the English language. In English, the subject goes first and then the verb, followed by the direct and indirect object of the verb. In Korean, the subject and the object go first, followed by the verb at the end. It is almost as if the listener is on the edge of their seat until the very end to discover how the previous words will connect together.

Along with a broader understanding, shadow feelings of shame, embarrassment, and anger also came to the forefront. As an adult learner, I am embarrassed and ashamed when I practice speaking Korean to Korean-speaking Koreans who either find it cute or disappointing that as a Korean person I do not know the language. By enrolling in Korean classes, I found a safe place to not only speak Korean and make mistakes, but also not be

susceptible to feelings of embarrassment and shame. In class, we are all adult learners wanting to learn the Korean language for different reasons.

As learning the language became more difficult and complicated, I needed more help. Surprisingly, my mother has been the biggest help to me in learning the Korean language. My mother and I have always had a complicated relationship. Up until this point, I did not feel the urgency to address our complicated relationship. Adrienne Rich stresses how women will continue to wander the wilderness until the line of love and confirmation stretches from mother to daughter.²⁶ A mother-daughter relationship often results in “practices of mother-blame, devaluation of motherhood, fear of maternal power, daughter centrality, and untimely disconnections.”²⁷ Rich calls this split between mothers and daughters matrophobia—the fear of becoming one’s mother. The intersection of contemporary culture and the institution of motherhood encourage daughters to blame their mothers and resent them for who they are.²⁸

I am the most like her: body type, face, personality, and creativity. Throughout my childhood, I had immense anger towards her. Asking my mother to help me with my Korean homework meant I had to address my *han* and reclaim my *jeong*. I had to establish and reestablish the grace margin, the *jeong-han*, between us. What I came to find is the expanding capacity to forgive and accept. Having my mother help me with my homework became a tangible practice in creating the grace margin between us. The first time my mother emailed my corrected homework was painful. Everything about my

²⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 246.

²⁷ Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 246.

²⁸ Paula Caplan, “Don’t Blame Mother: Then and Now” in *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment, and Transformation*, eds. Andrea O’Reilly and Sharon Abbey (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 237.

mother was exemplified in her red markings: over the top, vivacious, and colorful. It was too much. My homework was unrecognizable. Nothing of me was left in it. She had reworded it, changed it, and manipulated me out of my own writing. There was not a grace margin large enough to quell the anger and frustration I felt. The anger I thought had dissipated with distance and years gone by was merely asleep only to be quickly woken by one email. One email awakened all the hurts from my childhood. Negotiating with my mother on what she was allowed to do and not do, compromising with her on what I would accept and not accept actually became about our relationship.

Joonok Huh expresses her struggles of being a first generation Korean mother to her second-generation Korean American daughter. She says, “I locate myself between my American daughter and my Asian mother, and as I shift between the roles of mother and daughter I see that what is most important is not my negotiation with either my mother or my daughter but, rather, our survival together.”²⁹ Creating a space for creative play for mothers and daughters is vital in order to recognize the context of where theology and narrative come from. She says, “I locate in a space that is neither Korean nor American but that is both Korean and American . . . the mother-daughter relationship represents all of the dynamics of hierarchy, social negotiation, individual modeling, role playing, displacement, accommodation, resistance, and subversion.”³⁰ Huh has become the cultural transmitter, an interpretive guide, to her daughter—Asian and American, both and neither. She realizes as her daughter grows up, her daughter’s perception of her Asian

²⁹ Joonok Huh, “Constantly Negotiating: Between My Mother and My Daughter,” in *Mothers and Daughters*, 268.

³⁰ Huh, “Constantly Negotiating,” in *Mothers and Daughters*, 269.

mother changes. Her daughter understands and sees her more. The ability of the daughter to see the mother is important because it signifies a change in the relationship.

With each homework, my mother and I got better at our relationship. With each interaction, I began to appreciate and celebrate what makes me a good person and a good pastor is my likeness to my mother. My mother is like a butterfly. She flutters. She has the ability to do multiple things at once. She never chuckles. Everything deserves a boisterous, gut-aching laugh. She oozes creativity. She is a box of crayons—not the 24-count, but all sixty-four. Her words are colorful and yet sharp if you cross her. Her words have both healed and hurt me.

My mother said something that at first I did not understand. She said speaking Korean with her means that she does not feel lonely anymore. My mother speaks English fluently so her comment of having no one to talk to or understand her made no sense to me. However, as I am learning and understanding Korean more, I realize there are matters of the heart that cannot be conveyed outside the mother tongue—words of regret, sorrow, joy, and pride. The *jeong-han* between my mother and I was one that I thought would never exist. It was an intersection that I chose time and time again to never cross. But it is at this intersection that all of who I am exists.

MotherTongue³¹

Lately, I've wondered what I'd say if I
spoke my mother's tongue fluently, freely,
what I'd say to her.

What my mother would say to me if she
spoke my language too, fluently, freely.

I could tell her jokes.

She would not panic and misunderstand “police”/”policy.”

She could share with me family history.

We could drink hot tea and water the seeds

³¹ Ophelia Hu Kinney, “MotherTongue,” *Pursuit of the White Tiger* (blog), October 10, 2017, <https://pursuitofthewhitetiger.wordpress.com/2017/10/10/mothertongue-a-poem/>.

and speak of angels, of God and the Dao,
 and we could gossip.
 All I stand to give, could she stand to gain?
 Would there be laughter and would there be pain?

Limitations and *Jeong-Han* of the Inclusive Boundary Function of Theresa Cho

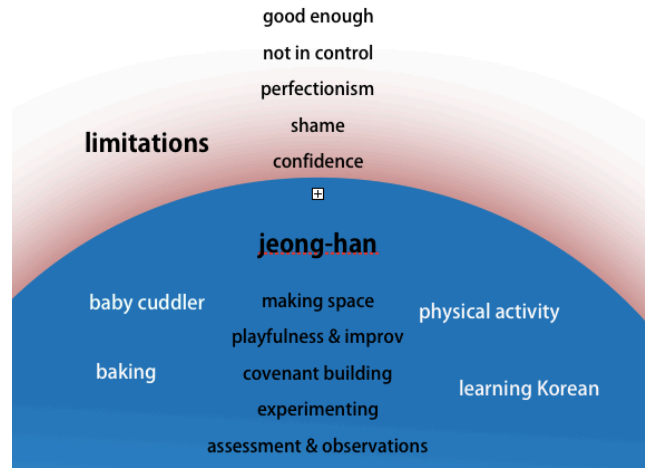


Figure 5. The fear zone is labeled as personal limitations and the *jeong-han* is the grace margin where the Rule of Life is practiced.

Just like my personal relationship with my mother brought out the worst and best of me, my pastoral relationship with St. John’s church does the same. I am a good creative pastor because of the *jeong-han* space St. John’s church has carved out for me. St. John’s church is a willing partner and co-journeyer as we define the third space of Christendom and post-Christendom and evolve to becoming a third place for families. St. John’s church has also poked at my insecurities that led to establishing and reestablishing the grace margin between us—negotiating my role as a pastor and a mother; clarifying moments of microaggression and tokenism; and working through the intersection of our competing identities. At our best, St. John’s church and I were able to embrace our individual and collective limitations and embrace our mutual identity of being good enough. At our worst, St. John’s church and I defaulted to self-destructive acts. For me,

those acts were cloaked in bearing shame, drowning in insecurity, and striving for perfection. For St. John's church, those acts manifested in fear, doubt, and playing it safe.

Life is not easy. Relationships are not easy. There are many intersections and sometimes not enough grace margins. My hope for St. John's church is that it can be a safe place where we can practice expanding and existing in the grace margin as we cross many intersections with each other, within ourselves, and with the world. By doing so, we will be better equipped to do so in our home, our work place, and in the many encounters we face outside the walls of the church.

CHAPTER 7

MOVING FORWARD

Acts 2: The Pentecostal Spirit

In Acts 2, something happened when all were gathered to one place. Jews from all nations saw and experienced the same event. They were not Jews who made a pilgrimage from different nations to Jerusalem. They were immigrants, inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have mother tongues and other languages of Palestine. The first church was an immigrant church. And on their first day of worship, a gift was given—the Holy Spirit. This is the same spirit present when the heavens and earth were formed. After six days of work, God rested.

Menuha is the Hebrew word for rest, but it is better translated as joyous repose, tranquility, delight, and absorption into the splendor of what is there.¹ The spirit gives space and permission to enter into *menuha*, rest. The spirit gives what Howard Thurman calls the “extra breath”² that provides strength in the midst of weariness and exhaustion. The Korean word for breath is *soom* (숨). The sound of the word requires one to inhale and exhale as the word is pronounced. When one more stroke is added to the word breath,

¹ Dan B. Allender, *Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 28.

² Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press: 1953), 134.

숨 + | = 쉬 the word transforms into rest, *shim* (쉬).³ This breath is found in the Korean word for Sabbath, *ahn shik* (안식) as well. The hanja for Sabbath can be broken down into *ahn* (peace and harmony) and *shi* (to breathe, pant, blow). “Sabbath means to breathe peacefully and harmoniously. Sabbath is a world where all can breathe and do so with joy, with fullness, with peace, with lightheartedness. It is to exude shalom from our very bodies.”⁴

To be led by the spirit is to be led to rest. As God was leading the people of Israel out of Egypt, God inscribed in the Ten Commandments,

Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. Six days you may work and do all your tasks, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you. Because the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Ex 20:8-11).

The reason to keep Sabbath is to break the anxiety and labor cycle created by Pharaoh who did not take any days off. God invades this reality and redirects them towards a life rhythm in tune with creation—where every seven days people, children, workers, and animals get a day off.⁵ Church is to conform to the rhythms of creation. Sabbath does not only break the cycle of non-stop work, but redefines community. The commandments do not only improve the life of the person, but the life of the neighbor as well.⁶ The Sabbath commandment is the bridge that connects how God is remembered and how the neighbor

³ Peace Lee, sermon, Korean American Presbyterian Clergywomen Retreat, Long Beach, CA, May 11, 2018.

⁴ Lee, sermon.

⁵ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 5 and 36.

⁶ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 45.

is remembered. Walter Bruggemann says worship “is cut from the well-being of the neighborhood and the protection of the vulnerable.”⁷ Worship must lead to neighborly compassion and justice for all, especially the most vulnerable.

The practice of Sabbath resists the culture of consumerism.⁸ The way people relate to one another reveals whether a church is defined by consumerism or community.⁹ “Consumerism is individualism on steroids. It is the logical end product of living for self.”¹⁰ Because “prosperity breeds amnesia,”¹¹ Sabbath situates God’s people in the covenant memory of the identity of God, God’s people, and the neighbor.¹² *Han*-memory can transform to covenant memory. If *han*-memory is embedded in the identity of the people, covenant memory is embodied in the transformation of *han* people to *jeong* people as they learn anew how to behave and love one another.

On Pentecost day, the spirit did not gently enter in. It came suddenly and violently—so violently that it left those present bewildered. They were able to understand one another speaking in their own language, which left them in fear. They were confused and left to ask the ultimate foundational question for the church—“What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12). If an intergenerational church opens the community to the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit, then that same spirit leads an intergenerational church to take care of the neighbor.

⁷ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 61.

⁸ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 13.

⁹ Ford, *The Transforming Church*, Kindle location 386.

¹⁰ Ford, *The Transforming Church*, Kindle locations 435-436.

¹¹ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 37.

¹² Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, x and 41.

Becoming an intergenerational church gave St. John's church a lens to recognize other intersections of diversity: gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and faith background. The makeup of St. John's church represented the diverse lives of the children: multi-faith households, multicultural families, immigrant families, and LGBTQ+ families. Being an intergenerational church was more than addressing different age groups, but also about addressing the many intersections of faith, race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. The grace margin, the *jeong-han* space, gave St. John's church permission for people to be themselves rather than conform to an unsaid expectation of what is acceptable behavior. Much like how the grace margin gave my mother and I permission to be our individual selves and let go of unsaid expectations of each other, we were able to see each other in our likeness and our differences. The grace margin between St. John's church and myself also gave permission for St. John's church to see themselves in a new way and embrace their new identity and therefore see me as their pastor and a leader who will not fill the pews with Chinese American families, but will journey with them as we live into our new identity as a third place for families.

Diversity is both a blessing and a challenge. Diversity in a faith community gives a wider breath and understanding of who God is. Diversity within a faith community can also either stagnate the forward motion of a congregation as there are differing opinions on how to move forward or a dominant group plows their agenda forward leaving the rest to either follow obediently, fight, or leave. Managing all the intersections of a diverse community requires that each worshipping member is also tending to the many intersectional identities within them—developing their own grace margin of what is safe and what is not or their own *jeong-han* space of naming their limitations and setting their

capacity to exhibit love. If I am unwilling to embrace the competing identities within me as a second-generation Korean American woman, then I am unable to address the competing identities of St. John's church. My adaptive capacity to see my own limitations and how the intersectional identities within me exacerbate or transform my limitations, increases my ability to navigate the adaptive journey of St. John's church through sabotage and risk-taking as it becomes an intercultural community. Diversity can lead a congregation to examine who they are and why they function the way they do. Diversity can expose and challenge assumptions made regarding people's faith, experiences, and needs. Diversity can escalate anxieties, fears, and discomfort in what used to be a uniform and peaceful community.

The Intersection of Affluent Church and Neighbors

St. John's church is a small yet affluent church and is able to afford two full-time pastors. The makeup of St. John's church is congruent with the neighborhood: predominantly white, professionals, and young families. The question is "who is our neighbor?" Are neighbors the ones that are considered upstanding, compliant, contributing, and acceptable? Are neighbors the ones that are hungry, voiceless, vulnerable, and without contributing value? Does St. John's church welcome those that reflect the current identity and demographic or does St. John's church welcome those that are hidden, undervalued, and unlikely to worship at St. John's church?

When St. John's church made intentional changes to becoming an intergenerational community, the church cultivated a permissive and welcoming atmosphere for children and adults to worship as themselves. Children could be grumpy which meant adults could be grumpy. Children could be messy which allowed adults to

be messy. They did not have to dress up or put on their best to come to church. The permissive and welcoming atmosphere was not only attractive to young families, but to single adults, same gender couples, interracial couples, senior adults, professionals, working class, and different-abled bodies. People had permission to carve out their own grace margin because the larger grace margin within St. John's church felt breathable, flexible, and inclusive. Over time, what identified St. John's church was not its affluence, whiteness, or family status, but the shared experience of loneliness and a desire to connect with other people of faith. Families, couples, singles, young, and old are not immune to the loneliness and isolation that comes with living in a city like San Francisco. The desire to find a place they belong. During one of the prayer stations, participants were asked, "when did you find belonging at St. John's?" The responses were varied, but people were finding a sense of belonging:

- When we started Harvest food pantry without caring about carpet.
- When I started speaking to my friends glowingly about St. John's and the work it does, especially those who I don't think would go to church.
- When I released my restrictive controlling idea of church and embraced God's love and the bigger sense of community as manifestation of love.
- It was just a feeling. We knew.
- When I was able to be a Sunday school teacher to the young kids.
- We were in desperate need of loving community when we came here. The warmth of the people made us feel a strong sense of belonging right away.
- From the first time I came for service. I felt the Holy Spirit's presence – "this is where God wants me."
- When I got up at 6:15 a.m. on Saturday after Saturday to help with Harvest food pantry and felt renewed and energized, having received much more than I'd given.

With increasing diversity came more opportunities to add to the list of fifty things to experiment. While intergenerational changes focused mostly on worship, St. John's church needed more structural and organizational changes to become an intercultural church. First, the church needed a shared language and vocabulary to discuss future

movement and the intentional adaptive changes being made. Together, the leadership studied what it means for the church to exist as a third place for people of faith looking for connection. How can St. John’s church be an easily accessible place for strangers to make new friends, old friends to reconnect, and casual relationships to be established?¹³ Churches as a third place can be a creative space where people find acceptance, connection, and belonging, but also permission to be different as well.

The leadership of St. John’s church focused on creating smaller third places within the church for people to develop closer interactions and relationships. The leadership, teams, and committees became less about decision-making and more about discovering and creating points of connection in the congregation. By doing so, people were invited into the grace margin at moments they were ready, but also moments when they felt gently nudged.

If St. John’s church was to be a third place, the church needed to relook at its mission statement or get rid of it. Patrick Lencioni says mission statements are often filled with generic buzzwords that offer no clarity or alignment to an organization’s purpose and direction.¹⁴ Lencioni suggests creating a playbook that answers the six questions: Why do we exist? How do we behave? What do we do? How will we succeed? What is most important right now? Who will do what?¹⁵ St. John’s church leadership answered these questions—changing the “How will we succeed?” question to “How will we know we are living in congruence with who we are?”

¹³ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle location 675.

¹⁴ Patrick M. Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else In Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), 77.

¹⁵ Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 135-136.

- Why do we exist? We exist to be an open, safe, and genuine faith community that connect a diverse people to one another and to God.
- How do we behave? We behave with a welcoming spirit, a willingness to risk, and an openness to learn from the other.
- What do we do? We find ways through worship, mission, and ministry to connect people to one another, their faith, and to God.
- How will we know we are living in congruence with who we are? By intentionally providing space for people to grow in their faith, we will maintain a sense of vulnerability, authenticity, and a desire to be challenged in one's faith, staying connected with the changing needs and desires of those we serve and partner.

Every session meeting, leaders answer the last two questions: “What is most important to do right now?” and “Who will do what?” The playbook is a reminder that all experiments must be in congruence to those answered questions.

St. John's church also needed to change the way committees functioned. The habit of doing the same thing over and over again was difficult to break. There were periods of non-planning just to break the cyclical habit of planning things that was not in congruence with the playbook. While the playbook gave guidelines, leaders felt stuck in how to move forward. Ed Catmull, one of the creators of Pixar, uses a Braintrust to address problems in a story line of an animation project. The Braintrust is a group of colleagues who are fellow storytellers and have no authority or power.¹⁶ They do not solve the problem, but help diagnose the problem so that the project can move forward. During the non-planning times of session meetings, the Braintrust concept was incorporated. People were invited to share experiment ideas and imagine how that experiment would be executed. Committees could playfully try something and then return for open feedback and discussion. Because there were no expectations of a certain outcome, each experiment became a learning moment on what resonated with the church

¹⁶ Ed Catmull, *Creativity Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* (New York: Random House, 2014), Kindle location 1467.

and what did not. More importantly, the permission to play loosened the hold of past habits.

This change gave me permission to play as well. A new challenge was a decreased interest in church membership. People were hesitant to become members — some did not want to make a commitment if they were not planning to live in the city for a long time. Some wanted to honor their multi-faith background or diverse religious family makeup. For others, membership held no intrinsic value of commitment for them. With less people willing or wanting to be members, the number of potential elders and deacons shrank.

Eliminating the membership process was an opportunity for St. John's church to answer and explore theological questions that addressed and unraveled the fears and assumptions St. John's church held. What does it mean to be a member at St. John's church? The fear and assumption was that membership was a sign of a person's commitment to the church. At St. John's church that was not the case. There were a number of dedicated people at St. John's church who actively participated and volunteered; yet they were not able to leaders in the church. If people are not members, then who is allowed to be baptized? The fear and assumption was that people would come to St. John's church to just be baptized and never return again. The truth was that was already happening. Membership was not a litmus test for worthiness of baptism or proof of a person's commitment to the church. When a child or adult is baptized, the church affirms that they will support and nurture the child and adult in their faith journey—however short or long that journey is at St. John's church. If there is no membership, who can vote on important church matters? The fear and assumption is that

only members have the right to make important decisions that affect matters of the church. The truth was that quorum was barely met at each congregational meeting in order to make those important decisions. The opportunity was to imagine how matters of the church could be incorporated into worship so that all matters were decided in prayer, thoughtful response, and faithful action.

Kevin Ford uses the word “partners.” He says membership has been corrupted by the consumer-oriented church—giving privileges such as baptisms.¹⁷ Membership is often limited to service within the walls of the church: tithing, volunteering as Sunday School teacher, or church-sponsored mission projects. Partnership communicates, “Your everyday life is an extension of our church's mission!”¹⁸ It is equally important to acknowledge what people do in their everyday lives as parents, business people, teachers, artists, doctors, and retired. Partnership encourages people to intersect their lives of faith with ways they advocate for justice and equality in their workplace, community, and neighborhood.

Moving from membership to partnership honored people’s intentions; opened the church to a wider pool of potential and diverse leaders; and provided flexibility around the revolving transient nature of St. John’s church population. Every year, the partnership list fluctuates as people are invited to renew their partnership or not—taking into account their personal situation. This gives St. John’s church a list of committed individuals to work with for that year. This shift from membership to partnership was a huge learning curve for all. Setting the grace margin meant knowing that if this experiment was not useful, the membership process could always be reimplemented.

¹⁷ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle location 603.

¹⁸ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle locations 632-633.

Becoming an Intercultural Community

With a workable structure in place, St. John’s church had the needed support to become an intercultural community. If the church was going to continue to embrace diversity, St. John’s church needed to make changes to be an intercultural church. Without intentionality and strategic moves to break down dominant structures of heteronormativity, whiteness, and affluence, the church would continue to struggle with the issues of diversity. Once again, St. John’s church needed to rename limitations, set a grace margin, develop a spiritual practice of self-reflection, and put into action a plan of inclusivity. In a qualitative research of multicultural Protestant churches, Assata Zerai discovered that “an inclusive church must be a social justice-oriented church, not only holding social justice among its ideals, but also integrating principles of social justice in its organizational structure.”¹⁹

Limitations of the Inclusive Boundary Function of St. John’s Church

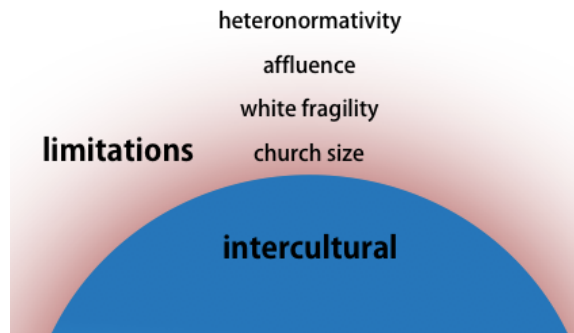


Figure 6. The fear zone is labeled as limitations of St. John’s church as it becomes an intercultural church.

For St. John’s church to be a third place that is inclusive and diverse, the main activity must be participating in the wider inequity that people face on the basis of who they are—ensuring inclusion and access for all. The church must be a place where people

¹⁹ Assata Zerai, *Intersectionality in Intentional Communities: The Struggle for Inclusivity in Multicultural U.S. Protestant Congregations* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 19.

can enter into Sabbath—a place to rest from the realities of the outside world and knowing they are in the midst of fellow journeyers who are actively participating to better the lives of their neighbors. It is not enough to be welcoming without taking action on the well-being of the people that is being welcomed. Zerai notes how inclusive churches take an adaptive action and seek out opportunities to be of service to those in need. “Adaptive change is necessary to welcome new previously unrecognized groups that may seek a church home.”²⁰

Why St. John’s Church Should Care about Immigrant Neighbors

Often people do not want politics to mix with church. Acts of social justice can appear political especially if it pulls at the identity group of individuals in the church. However, keeping politics out of the church is a privileged request. The rules of the world are set up to serve the pharaohs in our midst—the affluent dominant culture. However, the current political climate seemed to level the playing field as everyone felt the affect. Every month, a different march was organized at city hall in San Francisco. All these concerns intersected with one another. Mothers marched with their daughters at the Women’s March in the midst of the Me Too movement. Children brought their parents to March for Our Lives against gun violence. People of all races marched together to counter the marches supporting white privilege and to raise awareness for Black Lives Matter. Somehow St. John’s church had to narrow their focus yet maintains space for people to engage in their own passions.

The challenge for St. John’s church was finding a starting point—a place to crack the spine. In 2016, some people in the church gradually became more involved with

²⁰ Zerai, *Intersectionality in Intentional Communities*, 139-140.

concerns of refugees and undocumented immigrants. Not to mention many of the neighbors that frequent the food pantry were of varying immigrant status. Because of concern of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids at the food pantry, some volunteers trained to become ICE observers—documenting ICE’s behavior during raids. With the recent decisions of San Francisco and California declaring sanctuary, this opened up conversations for St. John’s church to consider doing so as well.

While St. John’s church had been practicing taking risks to be inclusive of all generations, taking risks to advocate for immigrant rights and justice seemed dangerous. Risks for being an intergenerational church involved ruining the carpet, getting your hands dirty in worship, or sitting next to a crying baby. Risks for being an intercultural church involved confronting prejudices and assumptions as well as safety concerns for the building and people’s lives. However, immigrants are risk takers. My parents were risk takers when they left their family, their country, and their culture to begin a new life in the United States with no guarantee that they could survive. Refugees risk their lives fleeing from violence or devastation in their own country to journey the many miles to another country in hopes they will find safety and hope. As an intercultural church, immigrants are the teachers and leaders in risk-taking. Risk-taking requires letting go of what is most valuable; dreaming of what is most desired, believing there is a way in the midst of insurmountable odds; mourning what is lost; celebrating what is gained; and doing it in community. In doing so, the *han*-memory of immigrants transforms to covenant memory in an intercultural church—both finding healing and wholeness in God’s promise.

Setting and Increasing the *Jeong-Han* Boundaries

I began by gathering people at St. John's church who were already doing advocacy work with refugees and undocumented immigrants together—creating the Sanctuary Huddle, a third place for people to connect in this particular effort. As the Sanctuary Huddle continued to gather, it became clear that a more collective effort needed to be made in order to have greater impact. Thus, St. John's church began the discernment process to declare being a sanctuary church. The first task was leading the congregation through a process of understanding why this was necessary and important. Some felt that concerned people could just do it on their own rather than involving the whole church. Others did not feel a direct connection or sense of urgency to immigrant issues. For many, this tugged at the affluent and predominantly white identity of St. John's church—pushing many out of their comfort zone and facing their own fears and prejudices.

Storytelling became an important and effective tool in unraveling the fears and assumptions around becoming a sanctuary faith community. The Sanctuary Huddle first joined other faith network groups and heard stories of how other faith communities declared sanctuary. Every story was different. Through these networks, guest speakers were invited to share their story in worship about their experience as undocumented immigrants. Many came as children refugees and grew up in the United States. English is their primary spoken language. Due to many different reasons, happenings, and circumstances, they remain labeled as undocumented immigrants even though the United States is the only country they have ever known. Their identity as undocumented immigrants makes them illegal and criminal. Hearing their stories, St. John's church was

given an opportunity to retell their story by sending in letters of support to the appointed judge—advocating for their release from detention.

The sharing of stories continued through reflection and prayer. Using children's books, prayer stations gave opportunity for participants to further consider the immigrant experience. It was important that these prayer stations were intergenerational so that all ages had opportunities to engage in the stories. Some of the prayer stations were:

- *Mama's Nightingale* by Edwidge Danticat is about a girl named Saya who is separated from her mother because she is detained in an immigration detention center. During their separation, her mother sends her cassette tapes of bedtime stories to ease the pain of separation. Who are you separated from? It may be a friend, a family member, God, or even yourself. Saya recites her mother's bedtime stories to ease the pain of separation. What words do you recite to yourself? What words give you comfort? Write those words on a postcard. Take it home and put it in a place to remind you daily that God is always with you.
- *My Shoes and I* by Rene Colato Lainez is a book about a boy named Mario who leaves his home in El Salvador to go to the United States to meet his mother. Mario has to cross the borders of three countries. They walk for miles, ride buses, climb mountains, and wade through a river. Mario has faith in his shoes. They lead him to reunite with his family. Take a look at your shoes. Do you remember when your shoes were new? Think about all the places you have gone in those shoes. Think about the people you were with at those places. Using a shoelace, string it with beads. With each bead, think about the people who love you. Say a prayer that all kids will know God's love.
- *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna and *Stepping Stones* by Margriet Ruurs are about a refugee child who migrates from home to safety. As they travel, they carry their possessions, memories, family, and emotions. As they travel, they let go of their possessions, family, and emotions. Reflect on all the people, possessions, and memories you hold valuable. Take a moment to say a prayer of gratitude for them. Take a stone for every one of those valuable things. One by one place those stones in the basket. One by one reflect on what it feels like to let them go. Take a moment to say a prayer of strength for yourself and others during times when we migrate from the known to the unknown.
- *My Two Blankets* by Irena Kobald is about a Sudanese child immigrant who moves to Australia. Because her new world is so strange, she wraps herself in her

blanket to comfort her. As she makes a new friend, she begins to weave a “new blanket” with new words and customs. As her “new blanket” grew, it began to be as comfortable as her old blanket. Change is difficult. Change brings us out of comfort, but it also may bring pleasant surprises. God calls us to tie God’s words around our hand so that God’s love weaves into us like a blanket. During difficult times, we may eventually find comfort in God’s words. In the book, the child found comfort in a new friend who helped her weave a new blanket. Who has come alongside you during times of transition? How is God calling you to walk alongside others? Write those names on a ribbon and weave them into the loom.

Creating a Spiritual Discipline of Playfulness and Improv

After hearing stories of undocumented immigrants’ experience, St. John’s church spent months sharing their own family immigrant stories. The church may be affluent and mostly white, but the people still had their own stories of migration and immigration. Some are further removed from that immigrant experience. Some are more familiar with their family’s immigration story, but simply acknowledging the common denominator that everyone is an immigrant revealed a common thread.

The church went through a month of discernment before deciding whether or not to declare sanctuary. While previous stories of others outside St. John’s church were heard, this time stories within the community were shared. Again using prayer stations, participants were invited to share their story and read other stories and see commonality yet differences in one another’s experience. The first common thread is everyone has a migration story.

By nature, we are migrants. We travel. We are all both welcomers and strangers. Therefore, life has always been holding both chaos and life together. Share one significant movement of migration that you or your family have had? What were the key reasons for the migration? How were they treated? What’s important for people to know about this experience? Write your story on a piece of paper, clip it on the screen, and share your story.

Another common thread is that everyone is an immigrant to the United States. A timeline

of every immigration law passed was posted on the walls of the sanctuary. Participants had an opportunity to read each law beginning with before European migration to United States, which was home to over ten million Native peoples, to the Chinese Exclusion Act ending with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the creation of ICE. They were asked to consider what law assisted or prohibited their ancestors coming to the United States. From this exercise, participants were able to see the diversity of immigrant experience at St. John's church.

What is the earliest ancestor you recall immigrating to the United States? Approximately what year was that? Choose two color dots of the same color. On the world map, mark where they traveled from to where in the U.S. they arrived. Connect the dots with a string. Write the year on the dot. On the immigration law timeline, find your year and read what laws would have prohibited or assisted your ancestor's migration.

Storytelling is also truth-telling—exposing myths and assumptions. One myth was undocumented immigrants were criminals. San Francisco was in the midst of a high profile case where an undocumented immigrant was on trial for killing a young white woman. Because San Francisco was a sanctuary city, the city would be harboring violent people. The truth is criminalization and immigration are connected not because undocumented immigrants are criminals but because their undocumented status makes them illegal. However, everyone is vulnerable to criminalization. John Templeton, an elder at St. John's church shared his story of how his younger brother, Sydney, who had autism died when taken into police custody. Sydney was under the care of the state of North Carolina and living independently with 24-hour supervision. Because people with autism usually do not like sudden change, Sydney would get upset when a new caregiver arrived at the house. Sydney only knew one word and could not easily express his emotions. The protocol when Sydney got upset was to send him to the hospital to be

sedated. One day, Sydney chased his caregiver out of his home and the police were called. Instead of taking him to the hospital, Sydney was arrested, handcuffed, and taken to the police station. En route, a spit hood was placed over his head, which upset Sydney even more. A struggle ensued and Sydney choked on his vomit and died. Sydney was not a criminal. He was the youngest son of the first black deputy sheriff of the county. Yet he was criminalized. After this incident, Sydney's Law came into being, where all police officers in North Carolina receive training in how to engage with people with autism.

John Templeton's story was truth-telling. For one, many people in the congregation did not know his story. The issue of criminalization was no longer an unrelated issue. It was an issue that affected someone in the church. Templeton is also a noted speaker and author on California Black History and a long-time Presbyterian. Templeton also shared other examples of noted people considered criminals such as John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela. Because Templeton was a trustworthy person in the church, he could speak to them as an insider and expand the grace margin and create another common thread.

More opportunities for storytelling were created in order to uncover the hidden diversity in the congregation. Storytelling became a spiritual practice for St. John's church as it continued to move towards being an intercultural church. We heard stories of how Samantha Lewins, a professional white woman and an elder, is in the immigration process having emigrated from Zimbabwe. She lived most of her life in Zimbabwe under tumultuous times. As an immigrant, she is routinely held up in the TSA security line for hours due to her immigration status. Doreen Ewert, also a professional white woman and an elder, is a Canadian citizen. She is active in the Sanctuary Huddle but does not

participate in protests or actions that are deemed unlawful due to her immigration status. Immigration was not just someone else's problem anymore. It hit closer to home.

Experimenting with Measured Changes

St. John's church declared sanctuary in October of 2017. The declaration did not require everyone to agree the same way regarding immigration issues. The declaration was an agreement to allow interested folks to do this work with the support and resources of the congregation. In declaring sanctuary, St. John's church entered into a network of neighboring churches that were also working for the rights of undocumented immigrants—expanding the definition of neighbor not just as individuals but other faith communities as well. The work of sanctuary churches is daunting and impossible for one congregation to tackle. The alerts, changes, and emergency response requests are numerous on a daily basis. With limited resources, St. John's church can only add a tiny piece to the wide spider web of congregations and organizations working with undocumented immigrants. Yet, with our ecumenical neighbors, we feel connected to a wider body of God's people. The journey to clarify how St. John's church will live out its sanctuary call was the next step.

The decision to declare sanctuary seemed easier than figuring out next steps. Again, finding a starting point was frustrating and unclear. To find clarity, the Sanctuary Huddle crafted a statement, a Sanctuary covenant, that defined and answered the Pentecost question, "What does this mean?"

We are St. John's Presbyterian Church and we choose welcome,
we choose human dignity, and we choose Sanctuary, regardless of citizenship
status.

We commit to continuously make our community a more safe, open, and real place for all, regardless of circumstance, including citizenship.

We believe this because scripture, and the witness of the Spirit, consistently confirm that we are to treat the visitor in our midst with love, just as we would be treated ourselves.

Our world is full of neighbors. Some next door, some on social media, and some who are unseen, and often avoided.

We believe loving our neighbors may take many forms as we humbly share the journey.

We make this statement in opposition to the extraordinary, systematic and unconstitutional discrimination and cruelty towards migrants and refugees, as a witness before God that not all are complicit in this oppression.

We then had to defined what we could and what we could not do. What we cannot do is provide physical sanctuary. St. John's church is limited in space and does not have the capacity to host an immigrant family in need. However, the church could commit to the following:

- Advocacy: educate ourselves and engage in dialogue.
- Accompaniment & Hospitality: reach out to neighbors; be physically present at court and other engagements of protest; provide financial and other resources; be open to having our lives changed through relationship with our neighbors.
- Networks of Protection & Rapid Response: train neighbors on their legal rights; not ask anyone their citizenship or immigration status; not cooperate with or assist investigations, surveillance, or information gathering unless compelled by a valid court order.
- Prayerful Discernment - work with other Sanctuary Churches, faith-based and non-faith based organizations; regularly meet in prayer to be open to God's call to move in new directions; walk humbly alongside our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, being open to hearing and seeing them as God sees all of us.

Jeong-han of the Inclusive Boundary Function of St. John's Church

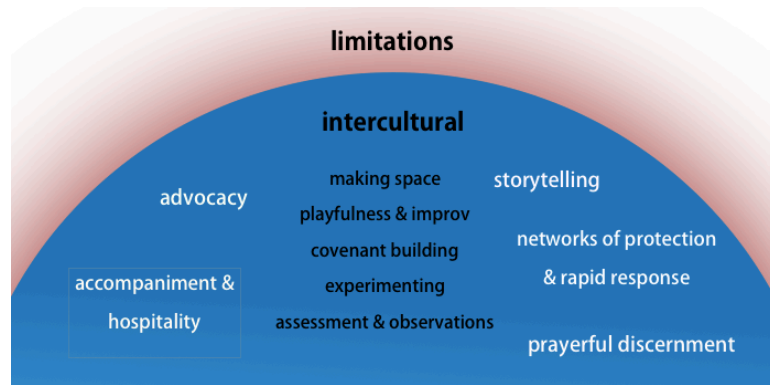


Figure 7. The grace margin is labeled as the *jeong-han* space as St. John's church becomes an intercultural church.

With each baby step, a millimeter of clarity is revealed. This work has tested the patience, commitment, and energy of St. John's church. We have doubted our importance, capability, ability, and experience to embark on such an endeavor. However, it has been faithful and transformational work.

Assessing and Observing Response and Effect of Experiments

At the one-year mark of declaring sanctuary, St. John's church held a fundraiser to raise bond money for undocumented immigrants in detention. The church had been participating in vigils outside the West County Detention Facility, which held many undocumented immigrants. Due to pressure, the West County Detention Facility ended its contract with ICE. Among the Sanctuary networks, there was an urgent push to raise bond money to release as many undocumented immigrant detainees as possible. Holding a fundraiser was a huge undertaking for such a small church, but some in the Sanctuary Huddle had built relationships with some of the detainees. After months of planning, the church held a ukulele and hula fundraiser. Other church members who were not a part of the Sanctuary Huddle helped—cooking food, making items to sell, and donating money. Neighbors who loved ukulele music came to the event and donated money as well. Other

Sanctuary churches and Sanctuary networks came to speak. Over six thousand dollars was raised. While the attendance and the money raised were astonishing, what made the event successful were the transformed lives of people at St. John's church. A year ago, the church never would have believed they had the ability to contribute in such a way.

Changing the church is about changing people. David Lamb, a retired gentleman who described himself as someone with no particular talent or skill, has been the inspiration and driving engine in the Sanctuary Huddle. While he faithfully attended St. John's church every Sunday, he was hesitant to volunteer in church activities. When St. John's church declared sanctuary, he began attending the monthly meetings. He was not interested in getting involved, but wanted to learn more about the issues of undocumented immigrants. Over time, he signed up with a network that coordinates people to accompany undocumented immigrants to court. No skill or experience is needed. An accompanier merely shows up and is present during the court hearing. Most of the time, an accompanier is not in the same room with the person charged. However, through a video camera, the person can see those that came to accompany them. Witnessing first hand how appreciative and supported the people felt just by his mere presence transformed not only his purpose in life, but also how he saw himself. He has become an evangelist and advocate for our neighbors in ways that surprise him. He has shared his story publicly in worship and on video. His transformation has not gone unnoticed and has been infectious.

Continuing to Manage the Changing of Personal and Pastoral Identity

As St. John's church was busy engaging in Sanctuary work, I was having a difficult year. Recovering from shoulder replacement surgery meant I could not

participate in my typical rule of life activities. I took a five-month leave from cuddling babies at the hospital. Any physical activity such as running and baking was halted. I was fully dependent on my family members to do basic everyday things: showering, eating, driving, and household chores. The inability to drive also limited my involvement with attending Korean class, going to work, and hanging out with friends. If this was my new reality, my rule of life needed altering. Macchia says the rule of life is not meant to be a “document set in stone . . . this should be seen as an on-going, life-transforming process.”²¹

While recovering from surgery, I discovered something new about my body. My body can feel pain. The day after surgery, I started physical therapy. The therapist taught me how to put on a shirt and do simple stretching and strengthening exercises. Not long into my session, my body began shaking and convulsing. Not knowing what was happening, the nurse says, “You are in pain.” My body felt the pain, but the pain signal was not being delivered to my brain. My *ma um*, my heart and mind, were disconnected. Realizing my body is not immune to pain meant that my mind had to learn how to pick up signals differently so that I did not reinjure myself. I had to accept that my body would never be 100 percent again. My identity resides in a body that is in a never-ending rehabilitation process and will always be dependent on medical care. While my body makes running difficult for now, my body has opened me up to a third place at the swimming pool. In the midst of co-learners, I am practicing to narrow the gap between my body and mind, my *ma um*.

Narrowing the gap of my *ma um* has not only been physical but spiritual and emotional as well. The year was also difficult because my son was applying for high

²¹ Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, Kindle location 2638.

school—meaning re-entering the public school lottery system again. The stress of hoping for a high school that was geographically close, had good academic standing, and was safe took its toll on the family. Ultimately, none of our hopes were realized. My son was assigned a school in a low-income area with poor academic standing and history of violence. The first three weeks of school are chaotic. Some students are transferring to other public schools. Some are applying for private schools. Some move out of the city with more amenable school districts. It is difficult to not get caught up in the frenzy and panic. Everything in my body told me to follow suit with the others. Yet while in my shoulder rehabilitation, my mind needs to listen to my body; in the case, my body needed to listen to my mind.

I began doing some research on the school my son was assigned—exploring the reasons why the school is not in good academic standing and not safe. Are the teachers not qualified? Are the students not motivated? Is the school really not safe? Thurgood Marshall High School sits on a hilltop at the intersection of Highway 101 and Interstate 280—located in the Bayview neighborhood. It is a completely different demographic than where St. John’s church resides. St. John’s church is located in the Richmond district, the northwest part of the city, while Bayview is located in the southeast. Richmond is a former naval base area turned affluent predominant white and Asian neighborhood, while Bayview was a shipyard and historically predominant black neighborhood. The disparity of funds raised at each school is reflected in the difference.

Over the years, Bayview has undergone several redevelopment projects, but still remains an area that has had negative interactions between the police and the black community. Marshall High School was not immune to such interactions. One of the

reasons Marshall High School has a reputation of violence was an incident that happened in 2002. A school fight had broken out, leading to many baton-wielding officers arriving at the scene. The police were accused of overreacting and making the situation worse—causing more students and teachers to get involved and escalating the fight into a riot.²² The reputation stemming from this incident has yet to die down. While the school is in a predominant black neighborhood, the majority of Marshall High School students are recent immigrants. Spanish and Mandarin are the top two languages spoken at the school. The high number of English as Second Language students contributes to the low academic standing as many students struggle with the standardized testing.

I would like to admit that as a daughter of an immigrant and a pastor of a Sanctuary church, I gladly accepted the adaptive challenge of having my son attend Marshall High School. However, I had to face my own prejudices of privilege, power, and ways I am complicit in the existing power structures. I grieve knowing that while my mind advocates for equality and justice, my body can expose how much more I need to grow and learn. Anzaldúa says it is important to ensure that oppression and dominant power structures are not replicated but instead dismantled.²³ My father was an immigrant and struggled to support his family financially; however, he came to attend a Master's program. He was the "right kind of immigrant." My parents followed the immigration process and were able to become citizens without too many obstacles. Many Asian immigrants with this experience hold the perception that if they can do it, then all immigrants can do it. But not all immigrants come with the same life choices,

²² Ray Delgado, Jaxon Van Derbeken, and Nanette Asimov, "Melee Closes High School in San Francisco," *SF Gate*, October 12, 2002, <https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Melee-closes-S-F-high-school-Melee-closes-high-2786017.php#photo-2203523>.

²³ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 84.

opportunities, and resources. Naming my own place of privilege in the conversation of immigration rights was vital in order to re-imagine and reconstruct my own identity and address my own *han* and the *han* of others.

A new rule of life for me was joining a network of other religious leaders in the city who were doing similar work with the issues that affect the most vulnerable. If I was to continue to lead St. John's church in adaptive change as a Sanctuary church and help my son adapt to his new high school, I needed a third place where I could enter into dialogue with others about affordable housing, income disparity, and the struggles of the public school system. Along with thirty other ecumenical religious leaders, I joined Faith in Action, a network focused on developing leaders and promoting civic engagement in order to confront power and change systems. We covenanted together to meet for nine months to study complex issues such as homelessness, housing, immigration, police engagement (particularly in Bayview), and racism; learn how to lead our congregation in affecting change; and listen to those most vulnerable in our community.

I have had opportunities to share with my son what I have learned and he has shared with me his experiences too. The teachers at Marshall High School deeply care about the students. They know my son by name and give him the attention he may not receive at a larger school. He is learning Spanish from his new friends and in return he helps them with homework. In his ethnic studies class, he is doing identity work on his place of privilege and class much sooner than I ever did. Together, we are learning to "settle down" and "promote the welfare of the city" (Jer 29.5, 7) and be transformed because of it. My rule of life adapted from providing Sabbath space for myself into creating Sabbath space for the neighbor.

SUMMARY

When I started at St. John's church fifteen years ago as an associate pastor whose focus was to attract more Chinese American families in the neighborhood, I never imagined St. John's church would circle back—focusing not on how the Other can benefit the survival of the church, but instead on how the church and the Other mutually serve one another and are transformed by that relationship. As an intergenerational church, the concept of neighbor was limited to those who walked through the doors of St. John's church. Now the neighbor has expanded to those who are affected by the policies, laws, and injustices enacted upon by the country, state, city, and neighborhood we live in.

I also never imagined how I would circle back to the early moments of my childhood when my baptismal identity was easily embraced. The journey back was not easy or even pleasant as the journey required me to see how my identity as a child of God and a daughter was a reflection of my mother—the *han* and the *jeong* of our relationship. If I can love her then I am able to love all the wonderful characteristics of myself that come from her and make me a good pastor. The journey also required me to look at how the adaptive journey of St. John's church intersected with my own adaptive journey. My role as a pastor and a mother may have been the impetus for St. John's church to be a third place for families, but their transformation also sparked a need for me to address my adaptive challenge of what kind of pastor I was called to be. This mutual transformational relationship and shared identity led both St. John's church and I to consider how our call was to not only be a third place for families, but all the diverse ways families are created.

Adaptive change is a journey with no specific outcome or end. It is a journey for the church as well as the pastor. If a church strives to be a more intercultural community,

then the church must ask what transformation needs to take place. A pastor and leader must discern what transformation is needed within them in order to navigate a church through the necessary adaptive changes. Transformation often involves identity work—DNA of the church and the light and shadow sides of the self. Transformation is residing in the in-between space (third space) where identity is unsettled and torn apart as well as created and reframed. Transformation is a fluid movement of celebrating self and grieving self. Confronting one's own *han* and engaging in *han-pu-ri* can strengthen and nurture one's capacity to exist in the third space.

As someone whose identity existed in between so many intersections, leading St. John's church to be an intercultural church should have come naturally to me as a leader. While my third space gave me capacity to lead the church through adaptive change and uncertainty as an intergenerational church—initiated by my own personal need as a pastor and mother, the journey to be an intercultural church was led by the people. I was the one who had to re-examine my third space as my identity as an immigrant's daughter intersected with power, privilege, and class.

A sense of belonging is found at the third place, where fellow journeyers hang out. A church as third place means there are partners deconstructing and reconstructing their own sense of self and faith. For St. John's church, the journey began with the adaptive challenge of becoming an intergenerational church. Using the framework of setting and increasing the *jeong-han* boundaries; creating a spiritual discipline of playfulness and improv; experimenting with measured changes; and assessing and observing response and effect of experiments, the church created a holding environment to increase their capacity to adapt to changes in the church and their own lives. St. John's

church as third place was establishing a creative culture within the church that adapts to the changing needs of its neighbors.

Declaring sanctuary was a concrete action in discerning what it means to be an intercultural church. However it is not the only way. As people move in and out of St. John's church, the ways of being an intercultural church will change as well. St. John's church can adapt and create a church culture of openness and creativity by continuing the process of resetting the grace margin, redefining limitations, and being open to opportunities of experimenting. The framework is not the magic solution. There is mystery involved as well. The adaptive change journey is dependent upon a particular context with particular people in a particular time. If the grace margin is too rigid, then the framework evolves into another technical solution or idea. However, it is meant to be playful and spirit-filled—surprising both the church and the pastor in what is possible.

Conclusion

For so many years, the identity of St. John's church was anchored in the limitations of their size, age, and resources. The belief was until St. John's church regained the size, activity, and resources of the glory days, the church could not be the "daring and confident" church they were created to be. However, there is no average size or amount of resources that qualifies a church as capable, healthy, or vibrant. Todd Rose argues what people deem average or normal does not exist.¹ Each person is unique and special and therefore cannot be lumped together to a national average.² Rose uses Air

¹ Todd Rose, *The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World that Values Sameness* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 11-12.

² Rose, *The End of Average*, 1.

Force cockpits as an example that national averages do not exist. In the 1940s, cockpits were specifically designed based on the average measurements of pilots. However, an unacceptable amount of crashes were happening daily using these well-crafted planes. Pilot error was assumed to be the reason. Upon further investigation, the Air Force researched how many pilots were actually of average size. The answer was none. “There was no such thing as an average pilot. If you’ve designed a cockpit to fit the average pilot, you’ve actually designed it to fit no one.”³ The cockpit seats had to be adjustable to everyone’s unique size in order to reduce accidents, expand the pool of potential pilots, and improve performance.

If the average size person does not exist, then certainly the average church does not exist. St. John’s church is small, but by what average is the church being compared. Compared to the twenty-two Presbyterian churches in San Francisco, St. John’s church is one of the largest. One of the hardest habits to break in the adaptive change journey is measuring success to the imaginary average idea of a healthy and vibrant church. Adaptive change is adjustable to a church’s size, ability, and capacity to do what is necessary to build on a framework that fosters transformation. To address my question, “Will St. John’s church still let me be their pastor?” after Rev. Anderson retires, I realized the answer was always yes. I, too, was measuring myself to some imaginary average of what a pastor should be rather than adjusting the seat to my particular size and comfort. The relationship between a church and pastor is symbiotic—mutually benefitting and impacting one another’s identity, call, and ministry.

³ Rose, *The End of Average*, 4.

In the Korean language, the possessive word “my” is rarely used. Instead, the word “our,” *woo ri* (우리), is used—“my house” is “our house;” “my church” is “our church;” “my identity” is “our identity.” My father once told me a story—a story about my name, *Eungyong* (은경). The hanja he chose for *Eun* (은) means “silver” or “polished so that one can see their reflection in the mirror.” The hanja for *Gyong* (경) means “bell.” When my father named me, his hope for me was that I would grow up to ring truth as clear as the sound of a bell. The adaptive challenge for me was ringing the truth of who I am as God created me to be as a child of God and as a pastor. Like the community named my children *Soo*, my name, too, was embedded with the hope and dreams of my community. St. John’s church is not “my church” or Rev. Anderson’s church. It is “our church”—*woo ri* church. Together we journey the road of adaptive change while ringing a sound that speaks to the truth of where we have been but more importantly where we are going.

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