



Hana

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*A Mixed-Method Study of The First and Second Generation
of The Korean Church of New England*

Findings, trends, reasoning, clarity for the Korean Church of New England



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"WHY HANA?"

Jane Chun, Primary Researcher

As a ministry dedicated to the second-generation of the Korean Church of New England for the past 28-29 years, ARISE has been working on ways to serve the next generation of the Korean Church. Throughout my time leading ARISE, I have always wanted to learn how the Korean Church is actually doing, not just from my experiences, but from you, the Church members themselves. "HANA" is a project that came out of this heart for our greater community. The core question of this project was, "How can we accurately identify the state of the first and second generations of the Korean American Church of New England, individually and in relation to each other?"

I took historical and empirical approaches to answering this question.

Between January 2021 and May 2022, we launched a twenty-two-question survey and conducted interviews of pastors and members from both generations. We also pored through Korean church history books to piece together a timeline of the history of the Korean American Church of New England as well as the relationship between the first and second generation over the years. The goal was to first, to identify what has happened to the first and second generation, and second, to provide a better understanding of the state of the church presently. This is so both generations will know how to lead the Korean church going forward.

This report is a preview of the more extensive version to be released in the fall. It might not be an easy read, but I hope it enlightens you and serves you well in your families and churches. I pray that your horizons widen to see the other generation in ways you might not have before.

A TIMELINE OF HISTORY

1930

International students at Harvard, MIT and BU start to gather in faith.

1952

A select few Koreans begin to stay in the area after the McCarran-Walter Act grants some Korean internationals to be citizens.

1953

The first Korean service (of what would eventually become Korean Church of Boston) is held across denominations.

1960s

International students cannot go back due to unrest in Korea. 94% of students settle in the US. The Korean church becomes a hub for all Koreans.

1970s

More Korean churches emerge, including St. John's UMC, North Boston Korean UMC, and Korean Presbyterian Church of Greater Boston.

1980s

English ministries begin to emerge in churches. Younger congregations reach out to more college students, which help EMs to grow.

1991-1993

English services across key churches in the New England area take off with large attendance and marked growth in members.

1994

Second-generation ministers begin to leave due to not being able to receive ordination. This impacts some EMs. ARISE is established as a joint summer retreat organized by a few college students who were serving the youth in Korean churches.

1998

The earliest record of autonomous English ministries leaving the Korean mother church begins on this year. This church, which is left anonymous, dies within the year after leaving their mother church.

2010-2013

Some churches begin to combine generations for service and establish English community groups to mitigate the diminishing English ministries.

2014

Smaller English ministries begin to consist of families and not college students or young adults. Other churches revive efforts to re-plant English ministries, but efforts are not successful.

2000s

EMs continue to seek autonomy and break off from Korean churches. Some relocate to the metropolitan Boston area.

2000s

Churches targeting Asian-American college students are planted in the Boston area. Boston Onnuri Church, a plant from the mega-church Onnuri Church in Korea, is planted in Greater Boston.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Where do the generations stand in the Korean Immigrant Church?

ACTIVE 1ST GEN, PASSIVE NEXT-GEN

Most of the Korean Church of New England state that they are regular members, and if you haven't been confirmed, many answer as regular participants. 71% of respondents in the survey answered that they were either already members or in the process of becoming members, and another 9% answered that although they were not members, they were regular participants. These respondents spanned across age groups, languages spoken, and generations. Compared to this strong majority, only 20% responded that they, in fact, are not regular participants or members.

Upon a closer look at this minority, the numbers are clear: 92% of this group comprised of the second and 1.5 generation. These numbers reflect a growing group of younger generation Korean American Christians that leave through the back door of the church. There is also a sizable decrease in participation from the next generation; among those of the next generation who participate in the church, 48% of the next generation responded that they participate in church less than they had two years prior. *Fig. 1* This trend confirms existing claim to show that next-

Of the 20% of people who responded that they are not regular participants or members, 92% were from the 1.5 or 2nd generation.

generational involvement and participation continues to decline. However, it is important to note that 39% of the next generation expressed that they participate the same amount or more. It is also important to also note that a decrease in participation is not the synonymous or interchangeable with a lull of participation altogether.

DECREASED/CONFUSED SENSE OF BELONGING

As much as we go to church for faith, one crucial reason for why we all come to church is community. This is even more so the case for the Korean Church; traditionally, the Korean church has been looked to as bulwark of hope through oppression, marginalization, and hardship for many first-generation Korean Americans.¹ This sentiment continued to reflect in our survey: 67% of first-generation respondents indicated that they have a strong sense of belonging to the Korean Church.

But this may no longer be the case for the next generation. Of those in the second generation, 66% indicated that their sense of belonging in the community is dwindling or that they do not feel as though they belong. 16% indicated that they did not belong and that they were happy that way. Similarly, of the 1.5 generation, 81% indicated that their sense of belonging is dwindling or that they do not feel as though they belong. *Fig. 2*

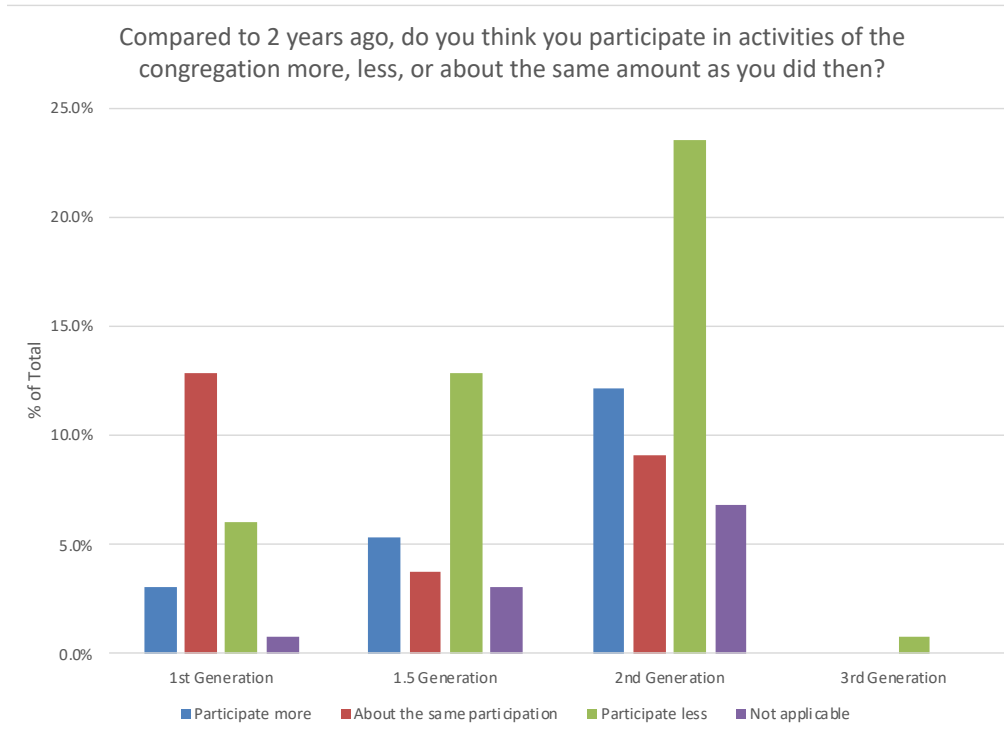
Still, many in the younger generations do feel belonging in the Korean church. 66% of second-generation respondents and 81% of 1.5-generation respondents expressed that they had some sense of belonging. *Fig. 2*

One person from the second-generation expressed that a sense of belonging comes from when "you're accepted for who you are." Another noted that they felt belonging the most when a first generation member took care of them. Others felt a dissonance between an external and internal sense of belonging: one person noted that while others "told me that this is my church, I was never given that internal choice to say that I belong here."

¹ Jerry Z Park and Kenneth Vaughan, "Sacred Ethnic Boundaries: Korean American Religions," A Companion to Korean American Studies.

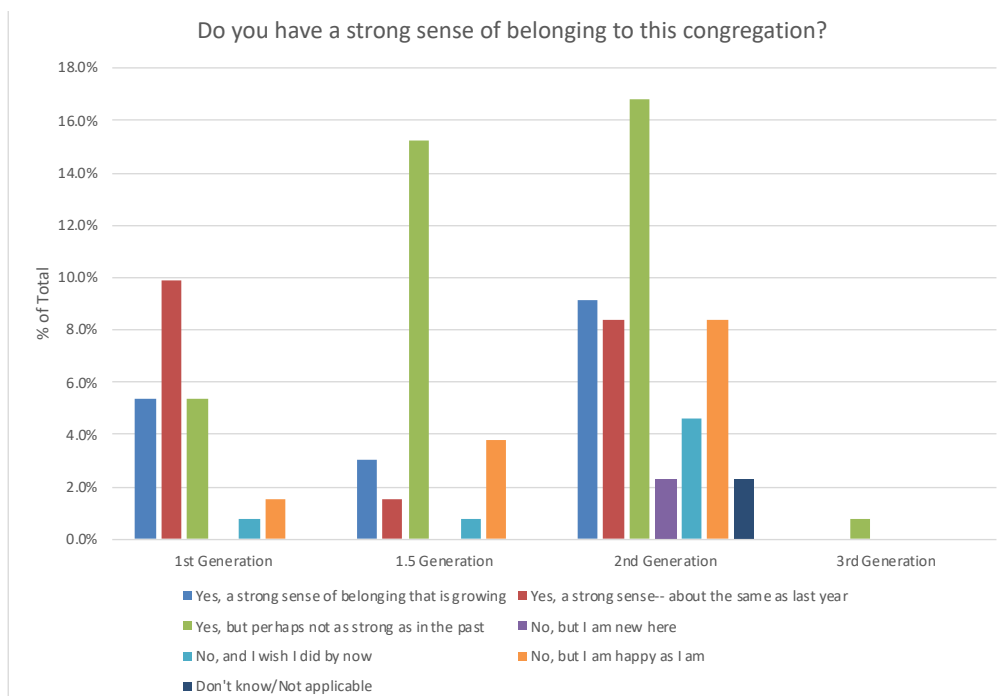
PARTICIPATION IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, BY GENERATION

Fig. 1



SENSE OF BELONGING, BY GENERATION

Fig. 2



KNOWLEDGE OF VISION AND CONFIDENCE IN CHANGE

How does the younger generation view the Korean Church's direction and capacity to change?

CONFIDENCE IN CHANGE AND VISION

It was surprising to find that all the generations were skeptical of their congregation's readiness to try something new. 60% of first-generation respondents answered that they were doubtful of or in disagreement with the statement, "This congregation is always ready to try something new." The 1.5 and 2nd generation answered similarly; 61% of the 1.5 generation and 68% of the second generation expressed doubt or disagreement to the statement as well.

However, there were nuanced differences in the way that generations responded. Although only 13% of the first generation did not think that their church was ready to try something new, 37% of second-generation respondents disagreed. 12% of the second generation strongly disagreed; this was around the same percentage of first-generation respondents who disagreed to any extent at all. **Fig. 4**

1.5- and 2nd-generation interview respondents

60% of the first generation, 61% of the 1.5 generation, and 68% of the second generation expressed doubt or disagreement to the statement, "This congregation is always ready to try something new."

echoed frustration in the ways that Korean-speaking members and congregations do not make enough room for change and growth, particularly for the next generation. Many echoed longing to go to their home churches, but did not see a way of attending while the church was not able to house them and make space for them.

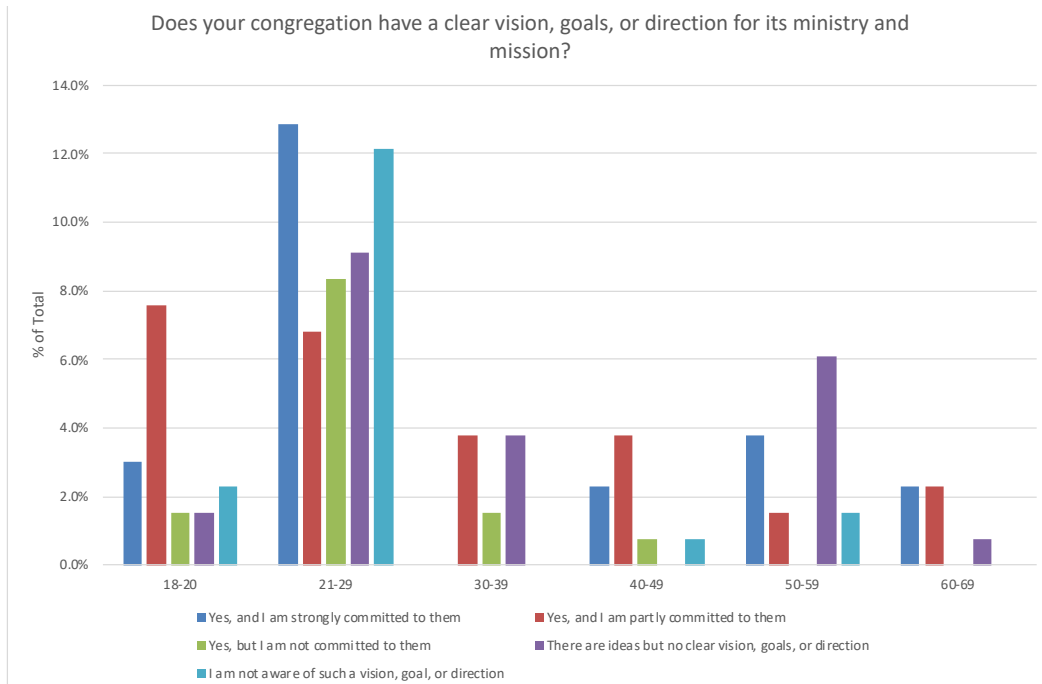
It is hard to tell what the future of the Korean church of New England will be. However, we can start by gauging the attitudes and dispositions of the members that make up the Korean Church of New England. The data points to difficulty; 38% of respondents across all ages expressed that there were ideas without concrete direction or lack of such a direction to begin with. These numbers are startlingly high across all age groups. 35% of persons over the age of 40 and 39% of persons under the age of 40 expressed this lack of direction. The younger generation seems to express greater confusion regarding the direction of the church; of all the respondents that expressed that they are not aware of a direction, 86% were under the age of 30. **Fig. 3**

There is a difference between not knowing the direction of your church and not being committed to the direction that you know. While 68% of the older generation of the Korean church (persons over the age of 40) expressed commitment to the direction of the Korean church, only 45% of adults under the age of 40 expressed commitment. 60% of the adults between 21 and 29 and 58% of adults between 30 and 39 expressed non-commitment or doubt about the direction of the Korean church overall. **Fig. 3**

Although we do see that the second generation does not know if the Korean-speaking congregation can manage change or try something new, 55% of members under the age of 40 do express commitment to the Korean church. Including the next generation in the future of the church could be the start to a shift in trend for many Korean churches in New England.

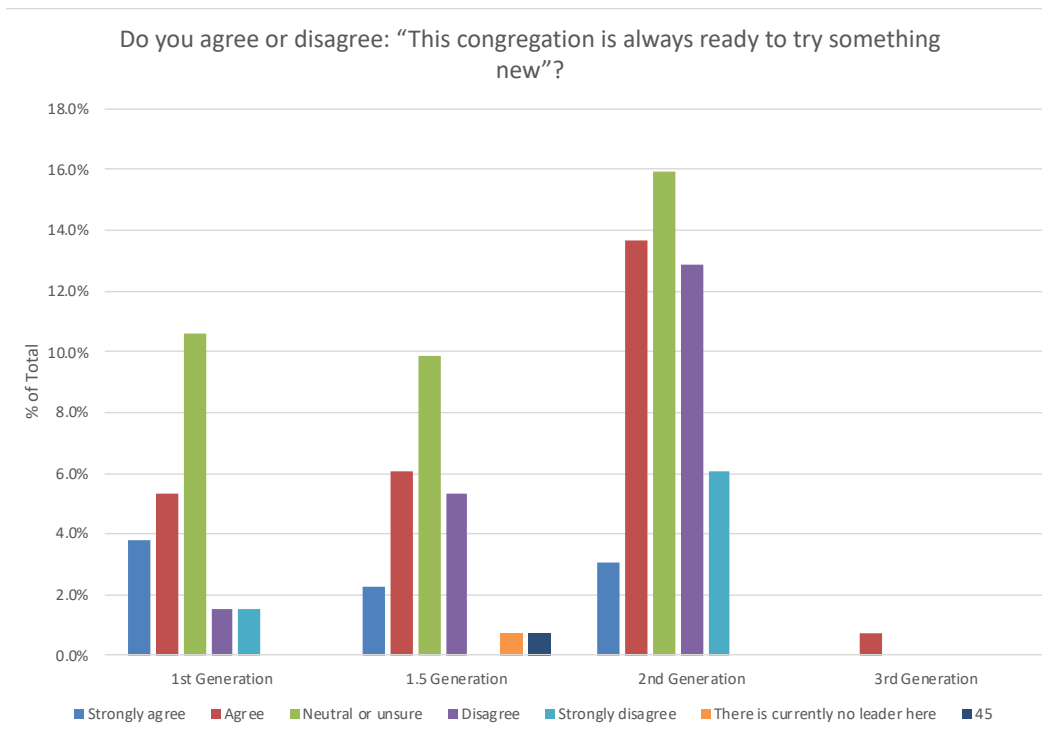
COMMITMENT TO AND KNOWLEDGE OF DIRECTION OF CHURCH, BY AGE

Fig. 3



OPINIONS ON CHANGE POTENTIAL, BY GENERATION

Fig. 4



RELATIONAL DYNAMICS BETWEEN KOREAN AND ENGLISH MINISTRIES

How are the relationships between Next-Gen and Korean ministries?

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND PRIORITIZATION

A critical question in our research has been: "What is the relationship between the English and Korean ministry?" To answer this, it is important to ask more questions: Does the Korean congregation know English congregation members? Is there any overlap in church life or programs at all? When looking at the findings of our research, the numbers are grim. 48% of all respondents didn't believe the notion that most Korean-speaking members know English-speaking members personally. Of those who disagreed, 70% are under 40 years old. However, they were not the only ones; 67% of all persons over the age of 40 were unsure or disagreed. In total, 66% of all respondents expressed doubt or disagreement that Korean congregation members knew English congregation members personally. **Fig. 5**

When asked about the relationship between the English and Korean congregations, 42% of respondents under the age of 40 answered that they were unsure of whether the relationship was positive. 38% of respondents over the age of 40 expressed uncertainty as

Of the respondents that did not think Korean-speaking members knew the English ministry, 70% are under 40 years old. Similarly, 67% of persons over the age of 40 also expressed doubt or disagreement.

well. Overall, 53% of all respondents answered that they either were unsure or disagreed.

It is important to also note that many more responded positively to this question. 47% of the younger generation responded that they believed the statement was true, and 47% of all respondents expressed that they believed this statement was true. Nevertheless,

it is important to note that the majority of respondents either doubted or disagreed with the statement that the Korean and English ministries have a positive relationship. When looking at the data, it is hard to tell how healthy intergenerational dynamics are right now. **Fig. 6**

One important dissonance in opinion between the generations seems to be whether the greater Korean church views the next generation to be a priority. While 77% of the first generation viewed that next-gen ministry was a priority, only 42% of the next generation thought so. Comparatively, 59% of the younger generations expressed that they either did not agree with or know whether the greater congregation prioritized the next generation.

Fig. 7 Similarly, while 47% of the first generation viewed that the greater church's commitment to next-generation ministry is publicly displayed in church life, only 32% of the next generation agreed. 68% of the younger generation countered that they either did not know or disagreed with fact that this commitment is public. Some of these respondents may not believe that the church prioritizes next-generation congregations at all. **Fig. 8**

These numbers point to a disparity between how the first generation views their involvement or care for the next generation and how the next generation views the first generation's love for them. It also points to the fact that no one really knows how the relationship between the younger and older generation is doing.

One thing is certain: the first generation loves the next generation deeply. Many first-generation parents and pastors expressed urgency and need for their generation to meet the younger generation better. While this data may be difficult, it could also be a start to more intergenerational relationship within the Korean Church.

EM/KM PERSONAL RELATIONS

Fig. 5

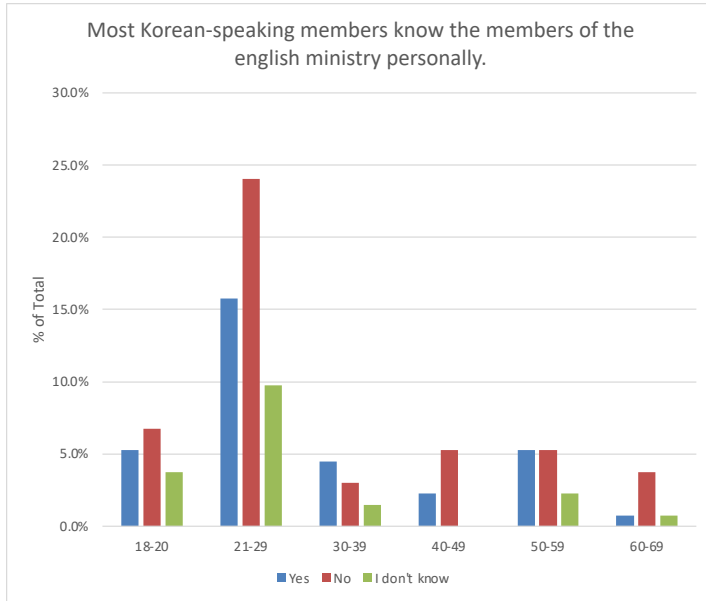
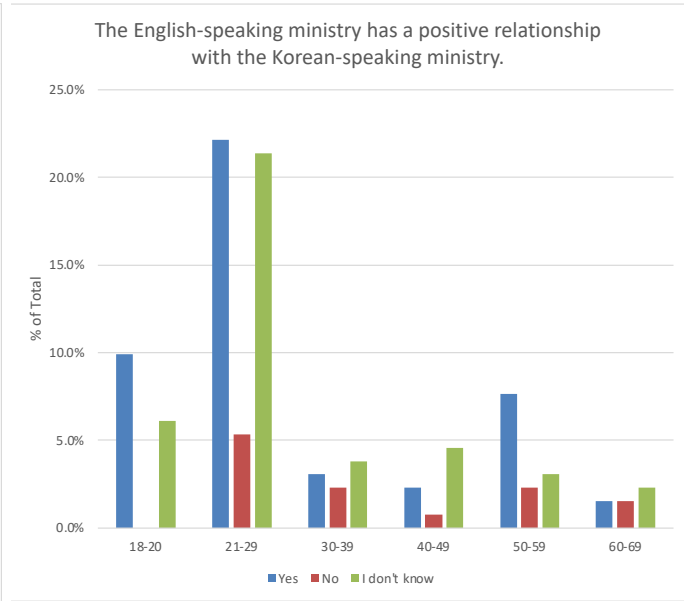


Fig. 6



PRIORITIZATION OF NEXT-GEN

Fig. 7

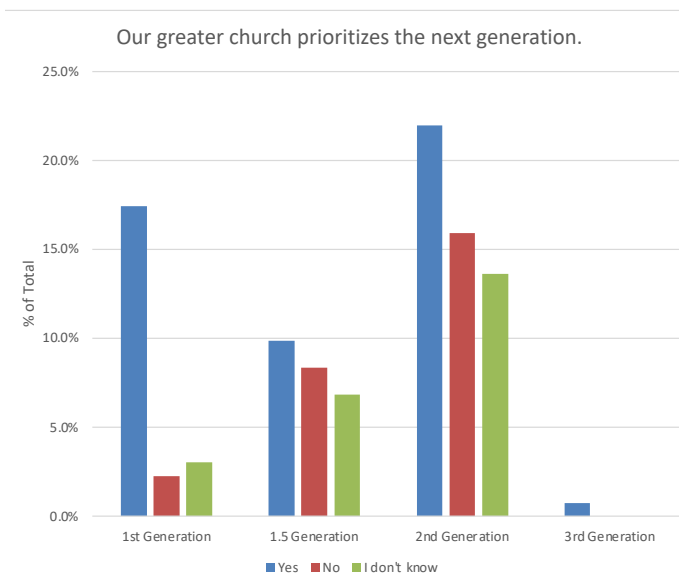
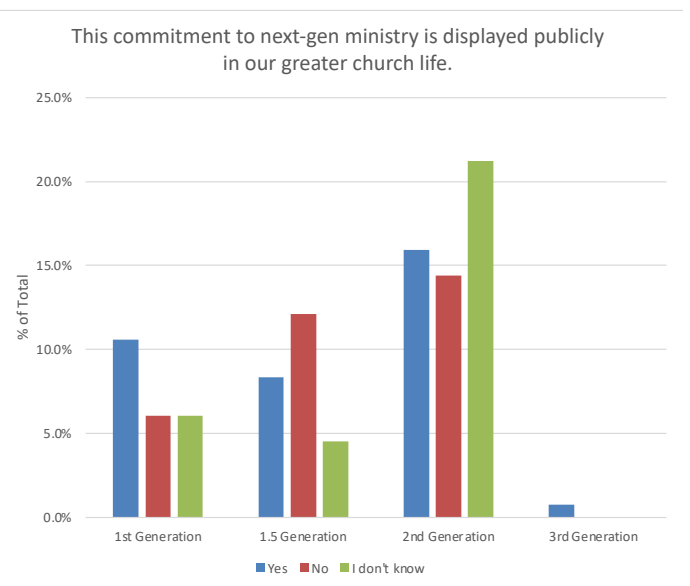


Fig. 8



MISUNDERSTANDINGS BETWEEN GENERATIONS

In order to learn more about this relationship between the second and first generation of the Korean Church of New England, subsequent conversational interviews with survey respondents in both generations were conducted. During the interviews, respondents explored their experiences in the Korean church and expounded upon their understanding of discipleship, mentorship, belonging, church membership, and intergenerational unity.

At the end of every interview, we asked the question, "What do you feel the other generation misunderstands about yours? If there is one thing you would want them to know, what would that be?"

All the first-generation respondents seemed to know that the younger generation has been hurt by the adults. Multiple respondents responded with an honest sentence: "We tried our best. We might have failed, but we did our best." One pastor in his seventies pointed out that the first generation tried their best to raise the second generation without properly developing an understanding of themselves. He noted that they never learned to "unlearn and re-learn," and highlighted this as a potential issue in the future when dealing with the next generation. Another pastor in his fifties pointed out that because of the collective trauma of the Korean War, along with many displaced families and loved ones from the unexpected division of Korea at the 38th Parallel Line, it is triggering to have the second generation leave the first generation. Another pastor pleaded that the second generation not give up on being a community with them.

Others simply wanted to say that they were sorry. This is important. In English, saying sorry applies to a plethora of situations; you can apologize for what you've done, and you can also be sorry for the loss of a loved one. Apologizing does not necessarily mean admission of responsibility or guilt. However, in Korean, to apologize is to recognize or take responsibility for your actions. The first-generation's apology is not light.

What is interesting is that, contrary to the first generation's thoughts that the second generation didn't know their pain, many next-generation respondents recognized the pain, trauma, and hardship of the first generation. Many expressed honor and acknowledgement of their effort, but still voiced their pain of not being seen. Nearly all called for open communication so that there can be mutual understanding and ongoing dialogue between the generations. One person voiced that while the first generation may be gone in this country in the next few decades, the next generation will have to be around for much longer. She expressed worry about the future of the Korean church for her children. Where would they go? She wanted them to have the Korean church but felt that because the first generation is not investing in the next generation, the Korean church will die out sooner.

“

One generation desires to be a community together again, mingling together in church. Another generation does not just want to be there. They want vulnerable conversation and inclusion in the future direction of the church. Both seem to love the other generation deeply.

Why is it significant that the first and second generational understanding for words like belonging and mentorship are different?

“It is hard, if not impossible, to separate much of the knowledge that humans share from the words in which it is expressed.”¹ Language provides framework for the ways that people think and form society and community. Without a mutually robust linguistic framework for key terms like belonging and mentorship, the first generation will not be able to engage with the second generation in the same way that the next generation might desire from them. Some of these differences are explored in the next page to give you clarity on how the generations view them differently.

¹ Neil Mercer, *Words and Minds* (London: Routledge, 2000), 17.

BELONGING

The word for belonging in Korean carries the meaning of being part of a larger institution. Linguistically, the word lacks a framework for relational richness and is the same word used to express when one is part of a government, or company.

Still, first-generation Koreans carry a deep sense of belonging with their church. One pastor expressed that while American society is largely contractual, Korean culture is covenantal. Another noted that belonging includes informed responsibility, participation, emotional connectedness, and comfort.

In English, to "belong" is to be a member of a group and fit in there. When you belong somewhere, you are supposed to be there, and that is the right place for you to be. When you belong, it is your privilege to enjoy and adhere to.

As individuals who were both Korean and American, next-generation notions of belonging drew from both their Korean and American roots. Regardless, nearly all next-gen interviewees expressed that they have had to serve in positions in order to securely belong in their church. However, these positions ultimately did not help respondents to belong in the Korean church.

COMMITMENT

In Korean, the word for commitment is decision-based and involves selflessness for the object of one's commitment. The word commitment directly translates as "yakssok," or promise. However, one pastor clarified that a more pertinent word might instead be "heonshin," or sacrifice.

In Korean culture, the concept of commitment exists in a communal paradigm. To have commitment is to be invested and locked in, even at the expense of the self, for the greater cause: the wellbeing of the community. This is because we all are a part of and belong to the community.

In English, the word for commitment hinges upon the willingness of the individual making the decision to commit. Next-generation Korean Americans tend to lean into this Western understanding of commitment; much of next-generation commitment is marked by an individual conviction to do so. Conversely, next-gen commitment is also severed when individual conviction or devotion runs out.

For example, Korean congregation members perform for Christmas for the community. On the other hand, the second generation is not afraid to voice their unwillingness, since they didn't ask to do it, and their commitment is not tied to their performance.

MENTORSHIP

In Korean, there is no word for mentorship. The concept of mentorship has been passed into Korean society but remains a Western concept. The closest thing that speaks to mentorship in the Korean language is "jo-eon-ja," which means "advice giver," or "seuseung," which means 'teacher.' These words connote rigidity within a context of learning, but is deeply relational.

One pastor didn't agree with a one-on-one model for learning. He noted that the idea of mentorship is Western and asserted that it is not a good fit for the Korean Church. Instead of individualistic frameworks for mentorship, he advocated for learning things with your community, all together.

The concept of mentorship is exclusively Western. It is when an older figure walks with a younger figure relationally, sharing wisdom and offering insight that the younger disciple follows.

Next-generation Korean Americans are exposed to prolific examples of mentorship throughout American culture and desire this. When second-generation Korean American Christians are mentored, this mentorship adds to their sense of belonging as well. However, the Korean first-generation does not operate on a paradigm of individual mentorship; they are used to the village model of teaching and do not often think to mentor in the way that next-gens expect until it is too late.

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A FINAL **NOTE** TO THE READER

I'm currently preaching through Hebrews, and the book of Hebrews talks about endurance. In the BDAG, a dictionary that I use, it says that this word "endure" in Hebrews 12:2 means "to stay in a place longer than an expected point in time." In this chapter, the author charges the reader to endure as we look to Christ, who "for the joy set before him, endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2 ESV). This definition of the word 'endure' is from the word that was used to define Christ.

We leave the church of our parents for a lot of reasons. I don't have to know your story to know that more often than not, it is valid. However, I want to encourage you to stay longer than you were expected and love on our older generation, not because it serves you, but

because it glorifies God. Obviously, this is not to the point that it hurts you and eats away at your soul; if you're not doing well, by all means, you need to go. I get it. I'm not talking about dying for the Korean Church.

But if there's anything this short preview of HANA has shown you, I hope it has shown you that there are things that you might not have known about the Korean Church. I hope it challenges you to open your eyes to see both your generation and the older generation enough to stay longer and see them more clearly. This might be longer than what was expected of you — if it is, then be comforted in the fact that your endurance, as a response to how much God loves you, is very Christ-like. And if you feel lonely in

your endurance, glance beside you— I will be standing there with you too.

I pray that our generation will remember God's faithfulness to Korea not long ago, honor the first generation, and take on this baton with love and humility, whatever that may look like. I urge you to look to God as you face how God loves the first generation and calls us to serve them too. In His grace and hope, one can turn to the truth that this story of the Korean American immigrant church is not yet over and that history of the Korean American church is still being written today. With this hope, there is a call to action for both the first and next generations of the Korean church. This call is an important decision to make for every individual. The call here is: "What will you choose?"



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