The Korean American Church: Fostering Belonging, Identity, and Cultural Preservation

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I. Introduction

Asian Americans, but in particular, Korean Americans, undergo a unique religious journey distinct from many others. Korean American churches transcend conventional religious paradigms by functioning not just as places of worship, but as vibrant social, cultural, and emotional centers. Established by Korean immigrants in the United States, these churches are often exclusive, consisting of mainly first-generation immigrant Koreans and their offspring, second-generation Korean Americans. Within these congregations, individuals not only engage in prayer but also partake in communal meals, social gatherings, and various aspects of daily life, effectively integrating their religious faith into their lived experiences.

I have found the Korean American church to be a most fascinating convergence of socio-religious dynamics and internal religious principles. In this paper, I will investigate the roots of the profound sense of cohesion within these communities and their dual role as both religious and tightly knit social enclaves.

I believe that Korean American church communities are so tightly connected because they have developed as means to preserve the distinct Korean cultural identity in a Eurocentric, American world. The proceedings of the Korean American church reflect the ways in which internal Christian religious laws have been mechanized to further preserve Korean culture, evident through the structure and teachings of the congregations. In the face of social marginalization, the Korean American church steps up, serving a purpose greater than simply religious practice. The Korean American church fosters a unique identity and provides an essential sanctuary of belonging, while also working to preserve ethnic culture.

II. History

The first true Korean American church attained its congregational status in 1921, as a result of a 1906 mission of the Los Angeles Presbytery. Immigrating to the United States was far from an easy feat — legislation including the 1790 Naturalization Act, Chinese Exclusion Act, and California Alien Land Law of 1913 effectively barred Asian Americans from moving to the states and owning land — however, little could withstand the powerful motivations drawing Koreans to America. Early Korean immigrants made religious participation the first major social priority of their community. Visions of self-governing, self-propagating, close religious communities, invigorated the Korean population. In 1903, the first Korean immigrants arrived in the States, finding work as agricultural laborers in Hawaii. Over half were Protestant[1]. "The settlers numbered more than 400 Christians, including 30 preachers who followed the immigrants everywhere".[2] On July 5th, they set up a chapel on the plantation in Mokolia, Oahu, and on

[1] At the beginning of Korean church establishment in America, there were five Christian denominations among the immigrants: Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, and Catholic. For the purposes of this paper, "Christianity" will be examined in reference to all Protestant denominations generally.
[2] Kim, Warren Y. *Koreans in America.* 28.

November 10, 1903, another on River Street in Honolulu, where they began worship services. From then on, Christian missions were established wherever a sizeable number of Christians went to live, becoming the center of social and community affairs, with the preachers acting also as community leaders. Every mission provided Sunday School and Korean language classes for children, some even had English language classes for adults. In time, more than two thirds of the Korean immigrant population became Christian. It was accepted custom for every family to support the churches and send their children to Sunday School for Christian education.

The larger waves of Korean immigrants came to the US following the Immigration and Nationality act of 1965, and in 2001, "the Korean Church Directory of America revealed that there were approximately 3,400 Korean Protestant churches in the U.S., or one church per 300 Korean immigrants".[3] Thus, by the 21st century, Korean American churches were establishing their presence nationwide — developing with it a distinct church culture.

III. The Korean Church: Fostering Belonging and Identity

a. The Search for Belonging

Understanding the role of the Korean church as a catalyst for belonging and identity requires recognition of why early Korean immigrants felt they didn't belong in the first place. It is no secret that being a foreigner in the United States is not an easy feat. Xenophobia against Asian immigrants became pronounced in the 19th century with the influx of Chinese laborers during the California Gold Rush, and later during the construction of the Transcontinental railroad. The increased presence of Asians in the American workforce painted Asian immigrants as a threat to the (White) US job market and led to the passing of discriminatory legislation such

[3] Kim, Julius J. "Reflections of a Korean American Presbyterian."

as the Chinese Exclusion act, and the Gentlemen's agreement of 1907,[4] and though open hostility from the American public marginally subsided with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, racism against Asian immigrants has continued to persist even through the 20th century. Facing identity-based prejudice and discrimination makes it hard to call a new country home. Bare necessities, such as shelter, work, and social interaction are extremely difficult to acquire when societal bigotry continually attempts to hinder one's success.

According to Professor Moon H. Jo, Korean immigrants in particular face two main barriers to belonging in American society. Firstly, the language barrier. Many other Asian immigrants, especially those from Hong Kong, the Philippines, India, and Pakistan are familiar with the English language in some sense, because they have had experience being raised in some state of Anglo-colonialism where they were familiarized with English as a second language. Korean immigrants, on the other hand, have had little exposure to Westerners, their culture, or their language[5]. As a result, Koreans who come to the United States are largely ignorant of the English language at the most fundamental level, and while English can be learned, the process is strenuous and takes time – time most immigrants don't have, as they scramble to find a roof over their head and food to put on the table. The consequences of being insufficiently fluent in English can be devastating, as it fares challenging to find places to live, opportunities for work, and importantly, makes it difficult to assimilate into American culture.

The second hinderance to Korean immigrant belonging in America is familial adjustment. Most Korean families have left a more traditional culture where things like gender roles, are

[4] Jo, Moon H. *Korean Immigrants and the Challenge of Adjustment.* 137.

[5] The Korean language additionally contains no elements of the Roman alphabet and is not derived from the Indo-European family of languages like the languages of some other immigrants from Western countries.

sharply defined. Arriving in the United States, they find a culture in a continual state of flux, a progressive country constantly pushing the boundaries of societal norms. Traditional Korean families fit the pattern of the extended family – where homes are shared with children, grandparents, and other various relatives – and generally follow an underlying patriarchal structure, with an emphasis on respect being paid to men, and to elders. Adapting to the American standard of the nuclear family requires fundamental adjustments in the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and even grandparents and in-laws.

Thus, assimilation – and therefore belonging – is not something that comes easy for Koreans in America. "Korean immigrants, and even second-generation Korean Americans frequently mention their feeling of being guests, unwanted, disenfranchised, and discouraged".[6] Tasked with altering integral aspects of their identity, Korean immigrants turn to the one place that offers cultural solace: the church.

b. The Church's Role in Belonging

When immigrants move to a new country, there are some elements of ethnic identity they keep, and some ethnic identities they lose. Previous paragraphs establish examples of these losses. The search for belonging is the search to fill these now empty spaces– immigrants will feel they belong once they have restored the elements of their identity they have lost.

For Korean immigrants, the church seems to provide exactly what they need. In essence, Korean American congregations provide what Professor Won Moo Hurh refers to as a

[6] Jo, Moon H. *Korean Immigrants and the Challenge of Adjustment.* 146.

"microcosm"[7] of Korean society, providing the necessary elements of their ethnic culture so as to foster a deeply connected community where immigrants feel seen, heard, wanted, and cared for.

One of the main aforementioned losses that occur when Koreans immigrate to the United States is the loss of ethnic language. The Korean American church provides a space where the Korean language is widely understood and spoken. Evidently, these churches are attended by many who speak Korean as their native language, allowing immigrants to fraternize in their ethnic tongue, but on top of this, church sermons, hymns and teachings are also all done in Korean. Emphasis on learning Hangul is put on youth in Sunday School, along with knowledge of Korean history and cultural traditions. In providing a space where Korean is the primary language, the church offers immigrants intellectual rest – a welcome break from constantly being asked to repeat broken English, or from the turmoil of trying to translate every sentence into a foreign language.

Other cultural elements, such as Korean holiday celebrations, are also a key element of ethnic fulfillment within the Korean American church. Traditional foods like kimchi, grilled meats, or a variety of stews are typically served at fellowship events, and even recreational activities done within the congregation – things like games, crafts, and sports – all bear striking resemblance to those played in the home country.

Outside of explicitly cultural elements, the church also fosters belonging by maintaining a fairly inclusive nature – that is, for those within the Korean ethnicity. Compared to other ethnic associations such as the Chinese Hui Kwan (district association) or the Japanese kenjinkai (prefectural association), which have specific requirements for membership based on native

[7] Hurh, Won Moo, and Kwang Chung Kim. Korean Immigrants in America. 31.

region, school background or occupation, the Korean American church invites every Korean, regardless of sex, age, or socioeconomic status, to join the church.[8]

There are also frequent opportunities for both informal and formal social gatherings, which provide activities outside the traditional church context. Sports leagues, picnics, performances, game nights, all provide the chance for congregants to develop social networks within the church, and foster relationships that extend beyond simple religious practice. As a *Los Angeles Times* staff writer put it, "the Korean churches have offered not only spiritual comfort, but worldly advice on every topic from paying traffic tickets to finding a job or the best school. People could pray to God, find a mate, make business connections, and read about a young member's acceptance to Harvard in the Sunday bulletin".[9]

Thus, the Korean American church promotes a sense of belonging for immigrants not just by replenishing lost elements of ethnic Korean culture like language, food, and tradition. The church nurtures a unique social circle, making it so that when an individual attends church, they are not only surrounded by familiar culture, but by familiar faces, and few experiences rival the sense of belonging felt in a space filled with one's closest friends and family.

In arguing for the Korean church as a primary method of belonging, inquiries naturally arise concerning the absence of other methods of connection. The exclusive ethnic nature of most congregations begs the question of why Koreans didn't lean on other minorities, or other Asian American immigrants as their anchor for community. The answer again concerns the intersection between preserving culture and community belonging. It is considered fairly out of the ordinary

[8] Hurh, Won Moo. *The Korean Americans*. 110.
[9] Carvajal, Doreen. "COLUMN ONE: Trying to Halt 'Silent Exodus': More Korean American Ministers Are Reaching out to Keep Younger Immigrants."

how many Korean immigrants hold Christian beliefs, especially in comparison to Asian immigrants of other ethnicities. In a 1978 study on Asian Americans in the Chicago Area, 32% of Chinese Americans reported church participation and only about 28% of Japanese, compared to a striking 71% of Korean Americans.[10] The likely explanation for this phenomenon is the presence of American missionaries in Korea, who played an important role in encouraging the first Korean immigration to Hawaii. Historical data reveals that, unlike Chinese and Japanese immigrants, a majority of early Korean immigrants had some exposure to Christian missionaries, and many of them were even baptized prior to their immigration.[11] The unusually high degree of Christian identity in populations of Korean immigrants provides proper context as to why the Korean church poses such a unique phenomenon. Korean immigrants chose Christianity as an anchor of community because it was a commonality shared only by Koreans. It was an opportunity to build a stable network around an established institution, while continuing to limit social circles to their familiar ethnicity, ensuring that culture would not be lost. The truth of the matter is, Korean immigrants, in their search for belonging, were not looking for connection with other minorities. They were looking to form an ethnic enclave that could fortify their culture, and their unique religious beliefs provided them just that.

c. The Church's Role in Identity Formation

It has thus been established that the Korean American church serves practically every function of community. A singular organization fulfilling social, cultural, recreational, educational, and even economic needs. However, the acute emphasis placed on development of

[10] Hurh, Won Moo, et al. *Assimilation Patterns of Immigrants in the U.S.: A Case Study of Korean Immigrants in the Chicago Area*.
[11] Hurh, Won Moo. *The Korean Americans*. 108.

belonging and community has some unprecedented implications. By establishing every necessary fundamental of community, Korean American congregations provide individuals the opportunity to essentially *live* through their church. The phenomenon inspires a unique situation in which the church serves more than just a feeling of belonging, but also provides the basis of an identity.

Identity formation within the Korean American church can best be evaluated through the observation of second generation Korean American Christians. They, unlike their parents, were born in America, or immigrated at a very young age. They often grew up in the church, and though they don't necessarily hold the same longing for traditional culture as their immigrant parents, they are exposed to the ethnic elements of the congregation early on. The identity of a second-generation Korean American is not one of an immigrant supplemented by the Korean American Church, but one formed purely within it.

In 1998, Professor Kelly H. Chong performed a study on the role of Christianity in shaping ethnic identity among second-generation Korean Americans which involved in-depth interviews with members of the Young-Adult Congregation, Youth Congregation, and Adult Congregation in a Korean American church in Chicago. Her findings that "the development of and commitment to Christian identity often coincides with the emergence of a stronger ethnic identity in the second generation"[12] provoke a wider understanding that the Korean American church has become synonymous with the Korean American ethnic identity.

[12] Chong, Kelly H. "What It Means to Be Christian: The Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary among Second-Generation Korean Americans." 265.

Compared to second-generation individuals in other ethnic groups, Korean Americans display a remarkably high level of religious participation.[13] This proves to be an outstanding observation considering that many second-generation individuals do not struggle as extremely with economic and cultural integration into mainstream society. Second-generation Korean Americans don't require an entirely ethnic church to the same degree as their immigrant parents, thus it becomes clear that the religious participation of second-generation Korean Americans is driven by more than a desire to understand the Bible, or to hear sermons. Chong found that most members value being able to maintain their social networks with other Korean Americans or to "keep up" the Korean culture and language as just as important, if not more important than religious reasons for attendance. "Participation seems to be driven not only by a simple need for ethnic fellowship, but also by a powerful desire to preserve their ethnicity and culture".[14] The Korean American church has developed a culture so encompassing of all aspects of community that the two become inseparable. To be Korean American is to attend Korean American church, and if you don't, you miss out on indispensable aspects of life. You are disconnected from friends, from family, you have no ethnic unity, and you surrender the very culture that defines your heritage.

IV. The Adaptation of Internal Religious Laws

a. A Desire for Cultural Preservation

A prevalent stereotype exists of the old Christian Korean father, who speaks English with a thick Korean accent, who values God and hard work over anything material, and who is above all incredibly, incredibly, stubborn. And though this depiction may resonate with many children

[13] Chong, Kelly H. 261.
[14] Chong, Kelly H. 267.

of immigrants from many different cultures, there remains something outstanding about the tenacity of the Korean ethnicity.

In section III, several barriers to Korean immigrant belonging were addressed, however, one not mentioned is the tendency for Koreans themselves to refuse American assimilation. In his book *The Korean Americans,* Won Moo Hurh outlines various instances of the persistence of Korean immigrants when it comes to maintaining their culture in America. For example, unlike some other ethnic immigrants, Koreans almost never transition to using English within their household, even with their Korean American children. Nearly half of Korean immigrants never read American newspapers, whereas three in five read U.S published Korean newspapers regularly.[15] Most Korean immigrants eat Korean food every day at least for evening dinner regardless of their length or residence, education, or age,[16] and only about one-third of a sample of Korean immigrants in the Chicago area reported having non-Korean friends.[17] The persistence of Korean culture doesn't stop at physical aspects of life:

> Korean Americans' attachment to Korean cultural values and social attitudes is pervasively strong, particularly with respect to filial piety (honor and obedience to parents), negative attitudes on intermarriage, conservative gender ideology (traditional sex roles), family interest over individual interest, preference for Korean churches, and perpetuation of Korean cultural heritage among posterity. This strong ethnic attachment is largely unaffected by length of residence in the United States.[18]

In a unique twist of what typically is thought of as the goal of foreign immigrants, Koreans prove that they do not desire full assimilation into mainstream American culture. In fact, they would much prefer the preservation of their ethnic origin and the maintenance of their cultural values.

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[15] Hurh, Won Moo. *The Korean Americans*. 71.
[16] Hurh, Won Moo. 72.
[17] Hurh, Won Moo. 77.
[18] Hurh, Won Moo. 73.

However, this preservation requires a space that can act as an oasis from the ever-present Eurocentric influence in American culture. We turn again to the church.

b. "Koreanized" Christianity[19]

As a method of preserving Korean ethnic culture, Korean immigrants have altered the internal religious laws of the traditional Christian congregation. For the purposes of my analysis, I will break down the exemplification of internal religious "laws" into two distinct parts. Firstly, laws that dictate the structure of the church, as in – who can join the church, who has power, and who *can* have power – and laws that dictate the content and teachings of the church, as in the messages of the sermons and how they align with traditional Christian values (For example, the Ten Commandments).

When it comes to the structure of the Korean American church, there are two blaring examples of how traditional Christian internal laws have been altered (one could go so far as to say violated). Firstly, in the mono-ethnic composition of the church, and secondly, in the gender and age-based hierarchy.

One of the guiding principles of traditional Christian law is to "love your neighbor as yourself",[20] which explicitly urges Christians to welcome, accept, and value individuals of all backgrounds in the Church community. Further exemplified in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[21] The mono-ethnic composition of the Korean American church works against this law.

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[19] For her 2010 paper, Sharon Kim interviewed a young Korean individual at Resurrection Church in Los Angeles, who remarked "I've become more *Koreanized* since I joined my church". When asked to elaborate on what he meant by "Koreanized", he referred to aspects such as food, language, ethnic locations, and values.
[20] *New International Version*, Mark 12:30.
[21] *New International Version*, Galatians 3:28.

It is a benchmark characteristic of Korean American churches that they are made of – almost entirely – Koreans. For many, it's an attracting feature. Individuals seek out the "predominately Korean American church and appreciate the fact that their ethnic identity is practiced and celebrated within their churches".[22] As previously addressed, the ethnic particularity of Korean American churches is part of what fosters the innate sense of comfort, belonging, and security. Many see it as an oasis from the Eurocentric world. Sharon Kim quotes an interview with a Pastor conducted in her study:

> 'There is something about ethnic and cultural bonds that remain alive even with the forces of acculturation into American society. There is a sense among people who come to this church whose outside world is all white. When they come to this setting, there is a sense of 'wow, I like it.'[23]

The Christian law of inclusion and equity is further altered by the presence of gender and age-based hierarchies within the church. Most Korean American churches follow a vertical, male dominated hierarchical structure, headed by a male pastor, and governed by a large group of elders, all of whom are male.[24] Women are not only prohibited from the position of pastorship but are banned from becoming elders. The only leadership role they can take is that of a deaconess, and even then, females are often given the "soft" tasks like cooking, cleaning, and serving, while men lead the "hard" tasks like finances, and preaching. The adherence to traditional gender roles is also seen in social interactions within the church, men and women tend to "segregate themselves spatially", and events like bible study and fellowship meals are often separated by gender as well.[25]

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[22] Kim, Sharon. "Shifting Boundaries within Second-Generation Korean American Churches." 108.
[23] Kim, Sharon. 108.
[24] Chong, Kelly H. 272.
[25] Chong, Kelly H. 274.

The hierarchy is also strictly age based, following a strict authoritarian system of "respect", reminiscent of historical Confucian values of filial piety. Youth ministries, or second-generation ministries, are indisputably subordinate to the authority of the first generation. Contributions from youth pastors are often seen as "radical" or are silenced after being told they are "rocking the boat".[26]

The structural organization of the Korean American church is not the only aspect in which internal Christian laws have been adapted. Additionally changed are the religious teachings, or the content that is preached to the congregation.

In his 1982 paper on the use of rhetoric in immigrant Chinese churches, Lawrence Palinkas introduces the concept of "identification," a method used by pastors in ethnic churches in which they incorporate kinship terms, anecdotes, and analogies that relate Christian principles to ethnic examples.[27] By doing this, the pastor establishes an identification between the ethnic culture and Christian worldview. This process was observed in the Korean American church by Professor Kelly Chong who, in her 1998 study, observed the procedures and organization of two Korean Protestant churches in the Chicago area. Chong noticed a very "selective use and interpretation" of the Bible during church sermons and Bible lessons. Korean church leaders tended to pick and choose elements of Christian teaching that aligned with traditional Korean values. These values became even more explicit in the interpretation of biblical teachings. For example, one of the most prominent values in traditional Korean culture is obedience, which generally aligns with the Christian value of humility: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but

[26] Chong, Kelly H. 274.
[27] Palinkas, Lawrence A. "Ethnicity, Identity, and Mental Health: The Use of Rhetoric in an Immigrant Chinese Church."

each of you to the interests of the others".[28] However, what Chong observed in the Korean American church was less of an emphasis on humility, and more of an emphasis on "unquestioning obedience to parents". She notes the prompts given by a Bible study instructor to a group of young boys after reading a biblical passage designed to demonstrate the principles of obedience to Jesus Christ: "Do you listen to your parents? Are you submissive to your parents? ... To obey God and to have Him in you is to obey your parents!".[29]

Christianity, at its core, is a system of values and ethics. It is not unanticipated that Korean immigrants adapted internal Christian laws to better reflect their traditional cultural values, especially considering the fact that many other cultural elements, such as language, food, and holidays were already incorporated. It is also not fair to contend that these elements of the Korean American church completely reject Christian values. Elements of filial piety, and gender roles are certainly present in the Bible[30], however the distinction more particularly focuses on the extreme valuation put on unwavering obedience and submission as well as the maintenance of chauvinistic gender roles in modern times, all principles that are uniquely characteristic of traditional Korean culture.

By modifying classic Christian internal laws, the Korean American church most effectively preserves various aspects of traditional Korean culture, affirming their desire to maintain and exemplify ethnic values in a white, Eurocentric American culture.

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[28] *New International Version*, Galatians 3:28. Philippians 2:3-4.
[29] Chong, Kelly H. 276.
[30] A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." (1 Timothy 2:11-12) "In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders." (1 Peter 5:5), "Honor your Father and Mother" (Ephesians 6:1).

However, in doing so, the church entirely redefines what it means to be religious. Becoming Christian in a Korean American church entails serious acceptance of all cultural aspects, some of which are incredibly outdated and discriminatory. It brings an ethical dimension to the faith that extends further than the moral obligations a traditional Christian might face. In an interview with Korean American youth at the church, Chong asked, “What does it mean for you to be Christian?” and the respondent replied, "Christian values include don’t smoke, drink, do drugs. Be more merciful... obey my parents... treat our elders better. That would be a Christian thing to do.”[31] Being a “good Christian” in a Korean American Church is to be a “good Korean.” To be closer to God, one must be closer to Korean values.

V. Conclusion and Acknowledgement of Counterargument

The Korean American Church is an extraordinary institution. Its unique ability to foster intimate relationships and irreplaceable community for a population that is faced with systemic barriers to assimilation and belonging is a very noteworthy phenomenon in American society. The church exemplifies the determination and tenacity of the Korean people, and their devotion to their invaluable ethnic heritage.

Despite this, there are still many areas in which the church could improve. The most prevalent criticism of the Korean American church is, as touched on previously, its discriminatory tendencies.

The Korean American church, as evident in the extensive analysis above, is built on considerably conservative, traditional ideals. Looking forward to future generations in the church, a sense of irony emerges. As society progresses, we see the development of movements

[31] Chong, Kelly H. 271.

for LGBTQ+ identities, and pervasive trends towards comprehensive inclusivity across various spheres of society. Many Korean American churches are failing to adapt to these changes. Most Korean churches continue to denounce gay relationships, and even interracial marriages are often looked down upon. Though the church provided a sense of belonging for first generation immigrants, third and fourth generation congregates are finding it increasingly difficult to find that sense for themselves. In fact, many ethnic churches are having difficulty maintaining membership within younger generations, as many end up leaving because of their misalignment with conservative church ideals.

Additionally, concerns about the ethnic limitations of church membership are often brought up in the Korean American church conversation. Though not all Korean American churches are completely mono-ethnic, the majority follow that composition. The church is inherently racist, inequitable, and exclusive. In many ways, the evangelical initiative of the church is crippled. Christianity calls on all believers to share the gospel with others, but due to the ethnic exclusivity of the church, outreach is limited to fellow Korean Americans. It puts congregants at an ethical crossroad. Although members may want to reach out to their non-Korean friends, they are reluctant, as they might feel uncomfortable attending an entirely Korean church.

However, I argue that the distinct ethnic composition is the very essence of the church itself. The church was established as an escape from marginalization and belittlement. There is a sense of peace that comes with being surrounded by a familiar face, by people who understand your struggles and your hardships. The church was, and often still is, the one place in which Korean Americans can find rest. A place where they don’t have to force a foreign tongue or fake a taste for unfamiliar food. A place of solace, and that solace, along with the unique sense of

belonging, identity, and cultural preservation would be lost without the church's distinct ethnic identity.

This is certainly not to denounce diversity in churches, or to say that evangelism should be limited to the Korean ethnicity. I simply advocate for the importance of spaces where minority individuals can celebrate their identity, where they can feel at peace with their cultural heritage, and where they can teach future generations valuable aspects of who they are.

The church certainly is not perfect, but in a world in which challenges are constantly hurled at immigrants, and where second-generation minorities can often feel ostracized and alone, the Korean American church has, and continues to provide a unique haven of belonging, identity, and cultural preservation.

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