

The Association of Korean United Methodist Churches, the largest body of Korean United Methodists, recently voted to join efforts with The Wesleyan Covenant Association.

The United Methodist News Service issued a commentary from Rev. Sung-Ho Lee (Concord UMC, California-Nevada Annual Conference) on October 7, 2019 arguing against this move from the standpoint of a Korean pastor serving in a cross-cultural appointment.

This commentary prompted a response from Rev. Chul-gu Lee, President of the Korean Association of the UMC who wrote on behalf of the association. Rev. Chul-gu Lee is a clergy serving in the Florida Annual Conference.

Both posts were offered by UMNS in the Korean Language only. I asked a clergy friend to translate these. As with any translation, there is a degree of subjectivity involved. But I believe the translation to be faithful to the original posts.

Thank You,
Chris Ritter
PeopleNeedJesus.net

<https://www.umnews.org/ko/news/the-association-of-Korean-churches-future-and-theology>

By Rev. Chul-gu Lee (President of the Korean Association of the UMC)

(This article is a follow up counterargument against Rev. Sung-Ho Lee's article "A pastor serving cross cultural cross racial appointment, to the Korean Association of the UMC" that was published on October 7th, on the United Methodist News. This article may express opinions that differs from the UM News. We expect continued healthy discussions. Editorial.)

Official Stance of the Korean Church Association

Recently, Rev. Sung-Ho Lee (Concord UMC, Cal.-Nev. Conference) has written an article titled "A Pastor Serving Cross Cultural Cross Racial Appointment, to the Korean Association of the UMC" on the UM News. There he has expressed his view on the KCA joining the WCA, and shared suggestions, and here we will state our official stance.

Above all, despite the fact that Rev. Lee's article is his personal and highly subjective opinion, it feels as if he has expressed it as a common truth; as if he is observing the KCA from an omniscient perspective, and pointing to what will certainly happen in the future. The over all attitude in the article is "I am right, you are wrong." "KCA, you are being used by the WCA, so listen to me and get out!" The tone is blended between a suggestion and an instruction, which brings up a weird feeling to the reader. Even if you had a good intent, such a presupposition to "teach a lesson" will distort the listener. Another problem is that the readers will have an extremely twisted view of the KCA.

"The WCA has stated that the new denomination will have a missional conference for the Korean churches. Truth be told, that is not giving a favor..."

What is his basis for such claim? Rev. Lee should disclose the truth. "When the WCA creates a new denomination, 'they will allow a missional conference.' " I do not know where he got his basis for such a claim. During our meeting with the WCA, we have discussed about the Korean District or a Conference for the future of the Korean church.

We have not joined the WCA because the WCA gave us a favor. The KCA has only joined the effort of creating a New Methodism, to share various opinions with the WCA, not only for the Korean churches, but also for other Ethnic Minority churches that stand on the theological and biblical foundation with us.

It is too much an arbitrary interpretation. In fact, on the surface, Rev. Lee seems to be concerned about the union of the Korean communities, about their future, and about division when the KCA joins the WCA. But all the issue he raises is about "appointments," and dilutes the faithful and theological basis of deciding to form an alliance with the WCA.

"... the Korean community will be divided and be separated. If the KCA unites with the WCA, the plan to fellowship between four associations of NAPSCRCCA, AFKAC, NEXUS and the KCA under the umbrella of the KAUMC will be broken. The KCA will join the WCA, the KAUMC will be with the (remaining) three or be with the (remaining) three and Korean UMCs that has not associated with the KCA. That will result in a division in the Korean UMCs and in the KAUMC. I believe it will be a wiser choice for the KCA to unite with other Korean associations even though there are theological differences, than to join the WCA."

The reason behind the current division in the KAUMC is because there are people who fundamentally disagree on ordaining or electing a bishop among those who are practicing homosexuality. But he states as if the KCA is causing division by forming an alliance with the WCA. We cannot but say that he either misunderstood the current situation, or intentionally mislead the fact.

It could be that Rev. Lee has been serving a cross cultural/racial church, or that he differs from us theologically. Either way, I cannot tell if he understands the dilemmas the Korean churches have, and the concerns pastors who are serving Korean churches face. For instance, I cannot tell if he has seriously thought about real consequences the Korean churches and the congregation will have to face - the possibility of disaffiliations and divisions that will happen in the Korean church when the Korean congregation is challenged to conflict with their biblical faith.

"...the plan to fellowship between four associations of NAPSCRCCA, AFKAC, NEXUS and the KCA under the umbrella of the KAUMC will be broken."

What will happen if the KCA joins the UMCNext? That is like telling us to abandon our faith. NAPSCRCCA, AFKAC, NEXUS - if either one of the group has supported us publicly or privately, surely our coalition will gain strength. But on the contrary, didn't they criticized us as "irrelevant" or "those who can't think"?

As you can see, the UMC in U.S. the so called "progressives" are majority, and "traditionalists" are minority. What we have chosen to walk is the "narrow path." Right now in our denomination, when you support a "Traditional Plan" it is like "coming out." As such, in the woods of the One Church Plan, those who support the Traditional Plan are holding their breath.

The KCA has leveraged all of its strength to keep the faithful tradition of the Korean church that has stayed to this day - prioritizing it over the coalition among Korean churches and pastors. Therefore, the KCA will devote all of its resources to help Korean churches or pastors of traditional faith when they suffer disadvantage in the so called progressive conferences. That means, the KCA has decided to form an aliance with the WCA not to keep the pastor's job security, but to keep the faithful and biblical traditions of the Korean church.

"If the KCA joins the WCA, Korean missional congregations, pastors serving cross-racial/cultural appointments (from here "ethnic pastors", edit by J.R.) , female Korean clergies, and 2nd or 3rd generation Koreans in NEXUS will get a negative impact. In order to resolve their budget deficit caused by their split, each conferences will order the Korean churches to join the Korean Missional Conference. More over, at current situation, many missional Korean congregations have been receiving financial support from their annual conferences respectively. The annual conferences that are dealing with numerical imbalance of churches and pastors will have excuse to deny appointments of "ethnic pastors" (edit by J.R.) citing their lack of english fluency and by the fact that the Korean churches have disaffiliated."

In the current situation our denomination faces, whomever would advise the future of the Korean church will have to be concerned about the Korean church first - that is the only way to gain recognition of its sincerety. However, Rev. Lee seems to be more concerned about pastors than the church. Another issue is that he seems to be in accordance with those who are disobedient to the current Book of Discipline. And he should know the fact that such position is what has fundementally divided the UMC and the Korean community.

Also, "requiring a TOIEC score to ethnic pastors" is the problem in the Cal.-Nevada Conference - the so called progressive conference who claims to understand the ethnic minority; that has nothing to do with the Korean church joining a coalition with the WCA.

"Despite the existing conflict on the issue of homosexuality, the KCA should unite to overcome this issue with faith, praying along with all the Korean communities, to work on "Peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula," "raising 2nd generation Korean leaders in the U.S.," and "seeing God's great plan bringing the Korean immigrants to the U.S.," and to work "to restore the U.S. back to a normal state." "

I wholeheartedly support his proposal. As a Korean pastor, I always welcome such ministry to unite for the the homeland issue and for the next generation Koreans. You only need "patriotism and love for your people" to do that. But it becomes a total different issue when your faith and theology differs from the other and to join them to oppose your faith and theology.

* Rev. Chul-gu Lee is the senior pastor at South Florida Korean United Methodist Church, and is serving as the president of the Korean Church Association of the UMC.

The Original Post that Prompted the Reply

<https://www.umnews.org/ko/news/to-the-korean-united-methodist-churches-association>

(Note that these are subjective word-to-word translation, edit by J.R.)

By Rev. Sung-Ho Lee (Concord UMC, Cal.-Nev. Conference)

A pastor serving cross cultural cross racial appointment, to the Korean Association of the UMC.

Last April, “the Korean Association of the UMC (KAUMC)” has launched a Korean church caucus, “the Korean Church Association.” (KCA)

I have blessed the launch, and have suggested that the KCA, “National Association of Pastors Serving Cross Racial & Cross Cultural Appointments (NAPSCRCCA),” “the Association of Female Korean American Clergy (AFKAC),” and “NEXUS” become part of the “KAUMC.” And expected by next year, the KAUMC will be born again into one unified gathering from the (above mentioned) four associations.

However, the KCA is carefully considering to distance from the other three associations to join the Wesley Covenant Association (WCA). It looks like a good choice concerning its theological stance on human sexuality. (KCA gathered last August at Central UMC in Dallas, TX, and the leadership has stated to join the WCA, and that the KCA will unite with the WCA. Commented by the editor.)

But this choice will face three problems:

First, the WCA has stated that the new denomination will have a missional conference for the Korean churches.

Truth be told, that is not giving a favor. The WCA hesitated to leave the denomination not because the Traditional Plan has passed, but because it could not solve the numeric imbalance between churches and pastors. Therefore, in a desperate attempt, they are considering to appoint five pastors and let the church choose one of them, which is a mixed system of an appointment and a call system.

Under the current guaranteed appointment system, the laities who are discontent of clergies' job security, will now successfully pass a resolution to dismantle a guaranteed appointment system. Moreover, this is a clever attempt to deal with the numeric imbalance between pastors and churches by giving the church more selection privileges of their pastor.

In this difficult situation, where the WCA will not be able to manage appointments of the Korean Churches, this has become a great news for them, because the Koreans will take care of their own appointment by themselves.

Large Korean churches and self-sustained churches will have their wish come true. That is to get an opportunity to have their own Korean missional conference, and those who were not able to be elected as bishop will have a chance to become one, and will have an annual conference in Korean (language) by Koreans. However, it only serves to solve the (above mentioned) issues the WCA has been facing.

Second, if the KCA joins the WCA, Korean missional congregations, pastors serving cross-racial/cultural appointments (from here "ethnic pastors", edit by J.R.) , female Korean clergies, and 2nd or 3rd generation Koreans in NEXUS will get a negative impact.

In order to resolve their budget deficit caused by their split, each conferences will order the Korean churches to join the Korean Missional Conference.

More over, at current situation, many missional Korean congregations have been receiving financial support from their annual conferences respectively. The annual conferences that are dealing with numerical imbalance of churches and pastors will have excuse to deny appointments of "ethnic pastors" (edit by J.R.) citing their lack of english fluency and by the fact that the Korean churches have disaffiliated.

In our society, we even have a president who shouts to the elected representatives in office to go back home because of their ethnicity, and also have cesspool of racists who threaten to shoot and kill ethnic minorities. Eventually, if the Korean churches unite with the WCA, conferences will have an excuse to delay appointing ethnic pastors.

Already in California-Nevada Conference, they began requiring TOEIC (Test Of English for International Communication; edit by J.R.) score from ethnic pastors. A district superintendant representing the cabinet has consulted with the Korean pastors to see what standard they should set. An ethnic candidate will have to score around 850 to 900 to receive an appointment.

Third, there is a great concern that the Korean community will be divided and be separated.

If the KCA unites with the WCA, the plan to fellowship between four associations of NAPSCRCCA, AFKAC, NEXUS and the KCA under the umbrella of the KAUMC will be broken. The KCA will go with the WCA, the KAUMC will be with the (remaining) three or be with the (remaining) three and Korean UMCs that has not associated with the KCA. That will result in a division in the Korean UMCs and in the KAUMC.

I believe it will be a wiser choice for the KCA to unite with other Korean associations even though there are theological differences, than to join the WCA.

The WCA will only seek cooperation from the Korean churches on the issue of homosexuality, but will not work together with the Korean missional conference and will let the Korean missional conference take care of their confronted problems (appointment and financial support, edit by J.R.).

Despite the existing conflict on the issue of homosexuality, the KCA should unite to overcome this issue with faith, praying along with all the Korean communities, to work on "Peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula," "raising 2nd generation Korean leaders in the U.S.," and "seeing God's great plan bringing the Korean immigrants to the U.S.," and to work "to restore the U.S. back to a normal state."

I pray that the leaders of the KCA will consider these issues. I expect that they would rather cry and laugh with the "ethnic pastors," (edit by J.R.) female Korean clergies and the NEXUS, and share our voice in the U.S. society than join the WCA.
