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Cultural Constructs in the Korean Diaspora Church Context and the Leadership Challenges They Present to 1.5 and 2nd Generation Korean Women

A Research Portfolio

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Tyndale University

by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to determine how the cultural constructs of the Korean diaspora church have presented particular leadership challenges to a group of 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean women and resulted in detrimental experiences. This study is important because it revealed just how limiting and hurtful systems of leadership can be when they are not designed to give opportunities to both women and men. This research study focused on the experiences of Korean Canadian women and created a space for the group to openly talk about their experiences through narrative research, appreciative inquiry, and action research. Findings pointed to cultural factors such as patriarchy, which served to reinforce male-centered spiritual authority, and collectivism, which undercut the women's self-confidence in speaking up and asking questions and cultivated a dynamic where enough women were more comfortable in upholding the patriarchic status quo. It was clear that the Korean diaspora church must be more intentional in creating leadership opportunities for young Korean women and reconsider the cultural patriarchy that is embedded in the communal dynamic. The research findings were also not limited to the Korean diaspora church context; rather, an examination of how cultural constructs and systems shape perceptions of leadership, understanding of ministry, and of the individual leader is a principle that is transferable to other settings.

DEDICATION

To my mother, my aunts, and my grandmothers.

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We are all formed and shaped by others and there are many people who have poured into my life to encourage, strengthen, support, challenge, and refine. While I know I can't thank them all, I do want to acknowledge those who have been an integral part of this season of my journey.

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kept you low and stooped over but with every passing generation, our backs have become straighter and I am standing tall, shoulders back, because of you.

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone, every leader, is shaped by the surrounding context even as they affect change. We are formed by our home culture and upbringing, our teachers and mentors or lack thereof, our experiences—the challenges and the triumphs. We are shaped by the constructs and systems of the culture into which we were born, and we continue to be affected by our accumulated experiences in our respective leadership journeys.

This research project explored how the cultural constructs of the Korean diaspora church have presented leadership challenges to 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean women, which have resulted in detrimental and hurtful experiences. The research participants had the opportunity to converse openly and reflect together on their respective experiences in the Korean diaspora church, which not only revealed the cultural challenges the women faced but also allowed for the group to reflect on their experiences honestly and openly. It was a significant time of sharing through action research, narrative research, and appreciative inquiry and it led the group to recognize that we were all shaped by our past. We also had the opportunity to talk about our current roles as leaders, in addition to considering what practical changes, small though they may be, we could make to encourage necessary change for women leaders in our current spheres of influence. The current systems and models of leadership are not designed to maximize the gifts

and calling of women and we, as women leaders, became more resolute and determined to be intentional in making changes where we currently are.

Finally, throughout the portfolio, I have chosen to use the feminine pronoun she/her instead of the gender-neutral/gender-inclusive terms in reference to leaders. This was intentional in light of the specific focus of my action research project and because, after being considered "less than" our male counterparts, I wanted to emphasize that women deserve their own platform as leaders.

Not What I Thought

Is leadership ever what we think it is? We may have some theories and read through leadership books but when we're in the thick of it, it's never how we imagined it to be. At least, this was the case for me. Part of my problem was that I simply didn't acknowledge what was so obvious to everyone else. I, as a younger Korean Canadian female, had never, until the past few years, considered myself a leader. I, perhaps naively, had always thought of myself as just part of the pack, and if I were leadership material, people would have recognized this on merit. Growing up, the reality of gender and ethnic intersectionality and the challenges it brought didn't cross my mind. Cultural constructs didn't come to mind. When I was a younger leader, I just wanted to experience everything and whatever patronization I may have experienced, I just assumed it was because I was younger. I didn't feel the discrimination or the glass ceiling until I got right up close to it. And this inevitably happened because with each year that passed, it slowly became more obvious that age wasn't the only limiting factor. Eventually, I reached a point where I began to question why I was feeling frustrated. Why

were people were making assumptions about both my interests and abilities without even taking the time to get to know me? Why was I feeling uncomfortable and restless in the Korean diaspora community in which I had grown up and served my whole life?

These questions may have been slowly surfacing but eventually an encounter with a senior leader in a non-Korean context really pushed them all to the surface. I had respected this leader and when I was having some trouble with a supervisor who frequently talked over me and didn't give any of his team members room to lead on their own, he suggested that it was because my communication style may be "too Asian." In hindsight, it was an asinine comment, but in the moment, it was confusing to hear and made me feel like the whole situation was somehow my fault because I was "too Asian." It was a weird remark for anyone to say, never mind a senior leader of a Christian organization. Did he mean I wasn't male enough? Loud enough? White enough? To this day, I'm not quite sure what he meant, but I do remember feeling humiliated, unheard, and dismissed. However, it also started me on an important journey of self-reflection and strengthening my own leadership.

Consequently, as I reflected on my leadership journey, I began to explore how my cultural upbringing and experiences had shaped me and what lessons I could learn. I also realized that if I wanted to become the best possible leader that I could be, I would have to do the personal inner work of reconciling my past experiences with who I am today. Up until now, I had led well enough, but it was a dis-embodied leadership that could only work up until a certain point. I had

never fully embraced my whole being, and I didn't think about whether or not it was necessary to do so. But now, I believe that acknowledging the cultural constructs that shaped and formed us is an important, if not integral, part of knowing ourselves and leading from the core of our inner person.

"If Only You Were Born a Man…"

"…what a Caesar you would have made." That is a line from my favourite movie, *Gladiator*. It's a popular movie with many of my male friends but they never remember this line that Marcus Aurelius says to his eldest daughter, Lucilla. I remember this line clearly. For those unfamiliar with the plot, because his daughter is not a man, though she is intelligent and politically savvy, she can't be Emperor (or Empress) over Rome, and there is concern that the power might pass to her sociopathic and maniacal younger brother, Commodus. It does but not without a patricide and a cover-up and thus the stage is set for the epic Hollywood plot. All dramatics aside, I remember that line because so much tragedy could have been averted if people had just put her in charge. I also remember that line because the frustration I felt was so visceral. I had just turned 19 when the movie came out but was already feeling the constraints of the cultural constructs in the Korean diaspora church. Little did I know how deep the roots of traditional gender ideology reached and I also didn't realize how it would shape me in my leadership. But the cultural constructs of the Roman period didn't allow for Lucilla to inherit her father's leadership and Hollywood wanted a blockbuster. And it did make for a great movie even though, for me, art seemed to imitate life a little too closely.

Because Lucilla was a woman, she was never trained up to be her father's successor. She was never mentored to hone her leadership skills though she clearly learned them on her own. Likewise, I had never had personal mentors aside from my parents. It always caught me off guard when someone asked me if I ever had a mentor. There were people who encouraged me, leaders who opened doors for me that I could never have on my own, professors who educated me, but a mentor in the sense of leadership formation—no. But it was not for lack of desire or trying. I had tried to connect with seminary professors (all of whom were male), visiting them often during office hours to try and glean as much as I could in our conversations about God, life, and study but I slowly realized that my conversations with my professors were not the same as the ones they had with my male classmates and peers. There was a distance and the conversations just weren't as easy. I do distinctly remember a group of male students in seminary talking and joking with the male professors and knowing in my gut that I would never have that kind of fellowship. I just wasn't male enough and, regardless of their good intentions in trying their best to make me feel welcome, I felt as if the relational distance was somehow my fault. It didn't help that there were only four or five female MDiv students in our entire cohort. The distinct impression was that because I was female, I was too much trouble to mentor and get "too close" to. And so, instead of feeling like the professors were avoiding me, I decided that I didn't want to put myself through the awkwardness and tried to do the best I could by myself.

A Personal Journey

I discovered that leadership is not so much a calling as it is a journey of self-discovery and self-expression rooted in an authentic relationship with Christ. In other words, one does not set out to be a leader as much as one becomes a leader. Ruth H. Barton also understands calling as a wholistic experience:

> God's call includes (yet is not limited to) the particularities of our life, our heritage, our personality, our foibles, our passions and deepest orientation, and even our current life situation. Being called by God is one of the most essentially *spiritual* experiences of human existence, because it is a place where God's presence intersects with a human life. (Barton 2008, 76)

Leadership, then, is not a position or a role but rather, first, the presence of God in an individual's life. As a spiritual experience and journey, Christian leadership is also qualitatively different than the expectations of this world. When we consider the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, including his birth and death, he was nothing that the world expected and just as the prophet Isaiah prophesied about the coming suffering servant:

> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. (Isaiah 53:2-3, New International Version)

When we apply this passage to Jesus, we see that he was nothing that this world would consider a leader. He was also not looking for a leadership position, but was simply Emmanuel, God with Us. And while he was with us in body and flesh, he discipled fishermen and tax collectors to become his apostles and ministered to sinners who would become his witnesses. He was unassuming to the world and

yet when he interacted with people, he was fully present and many found the Good Shepherd, the Son of God, the Messiah, their salvation, and their own calling.

In my personal journey, for so much of my life, I was striving for achievements and literally going from one country to another, without having the opportunity or attentiveness to pause and consider how God had created me and called me into a narrative that had begun before I was born. I had always recognized that generational continuity was built into the Kingdom of God—hence my dedication to youth and young people—but I failed to really grasp this in my own life. I knew about my family history, discovering more and more through the stories my parents shared with me as I got older, but my Korean heritage, immigrant family experience, and gender were things that I accepted as default—one must be born in some place and in some form, one way or another—rather than as God's intentional design and purpose. As I was growing up, there were more than just a few times when I wished I was not so visibly different from my Caucasian friends (I certainly did not feel different) and wondered why God gave boys more opportunities and less "rules." Now, looking back, I can see that God was very intentional and purposeful, despite the questioning and doubting, in forming me to be who I am today.

Reading through the various leadership journeys and challenging experiences of other Korean Christian women leaders in the anthology, *Here I Am: Faith Stories of Korean American Clergywomen,* edited by Grace Ji-Sun Kim, was personally affirming. Their leadership character was forged through

their own challenges and struggles as they confronted cultural traditions that limited their leadership opportunities because of their gender (Kim 2005, 1-2). I identified deeply with their stories and the struggles that made them the Korean Christian women leaders in their ministry context.

Branson proposes that, "Leadership is about shaping an environment in which the people of God participate in the action-reflection cycle as they gain new capacities to discern what God is doing among and around them." (Branson 2011, 57) This ability to "gain new capacities" of discerning God's purpose and movement in our respective ministry contexts is not external but, rather, it is rooted in our knowledge and embracing of self and our relationship with God through Christ. And we know ourselves better as we get closer to God. Therefore, it is crucial that our relationship with God is authentic so that when we face challenges and struggles, we are able to stay true to ourselves and to the image of Christ that is being refined in us. We must guard ourselves so that our authenticity is neither feigned for the public nor rooted in how others perceive or want to perceive us but rather in our relationship with Christ. And in order to have a real relationship with Christ, we begin by recognizing his intentionality in how he created us as individuals. The embodied self, how God created us with the bodies we have, needs to be embraced and our personal context must also be internally processed in order for the Christian leader to truly discern what God is doing in the greater ministry context. For me, this meant acknowledging that my gender and ethnicity brought with them unique challenges that couldn't be solved by pretending they didn't exist. I needed to face who I was as a Korean Canadian

female and how this had shaped me as a leader. After all, how can anyone know what is really going on around them if they are not rooted in a solid understanding—growing though it may be—of who they are themselves? If the self is not anchored in Christ, we become nothing more than trend-following leaders who pose for the public and bend to the will of appeasement. In other words, the Christian leader's steadfastness must be rooted in her relationship with Christ, acknowledging all she is as God's daughter even as she is being formed into his image. Therefore, for me, this meant truly embracing my Korean heritage and my Korean Canadian second-generation experience as an integral part of my leadership journey. Otherwise, as Branson implies, I limit my ability to discern what God is doing around me. My very existence is his calling in my life and from here, my leadership is developed.

A Korean Heritage in a Canadian Context

One of the most formative factors in my life was my Korean heritage and the accompanying cultural assumptions that were part and parcel of our immigrant family experience. I had always known that our home-culture was different. Our family did things differently than my other friends and peers: we spoke a different language at home, we certainly ate different foods, and we also had different house-rules. For example, I was taught never to call my brother by his first name. If I did, I had to be accompanied by "Obba" (Korean word for "older brother" for a sister), indicating the family order that he was older than me. By and large, these family rules did not bother me but, even as a child, I could feel an inner confusion that was brewing which later became a tense internal

conflict in my adolescent and young adult years. In my younger years, I had understood that this was just how things were done. However, in my older years, I began to ask why these things were done the "Korean" way and I had seen enough examples around me that the "Korean" way was not the only way. And all the cultural rules were micro-expressions of a deeper and hidden worldview that I was not fully aware of. It was like I could see the leaves on the tree, but I could not see the roots.

External cultural markers, which could be considered more obvious and less intense, such as clothing, food, and language, were not the problem. It was the deeper aspects of Korean culture that found expression in our Korean diaspora church community which shaped my worldview and with which I had to come to terms. More specifically, they were the Korean traditional views on distinct gender-roles coupled with the age-elder seniority; in other words, patriarchy and an age-based established hierarchy.

Interestingly, at home neither of my parents were bound by strict gender roles. They encouraged me to excel in sports, arts, music, academia—whatever I wanted—and with them, I never felt second place regardless of the fact that I was the younger sister and my brother was both older and the first male grandchild from both sides of the family. I will say, however, that because we lived with my grandparents and my parents were working a lot, my grandparents' traditional worldview did affect me greatly. My parents' encouragement to excel at whatever I wanted ran counter to my grandparents' traditional expectations and it was a

manifestation of the struggle within me. I wanted to both belong to my Korean tradition but, as a younger female, I wanted to break away.

While my home life was a mix of both Canadian and Korean culture, what I saw and experienced in my Korean diaspora church community with regards to women in leadership was much more traditional with limited opportunities available for women leaders. Hence, when at the young age of thirteen, I felt a distinct call to ministry, the thought of ordained pastoral ministry never even crossed my mind. I had never seen a woman pastor and the only roles women played in ministry were overseeing small children, taking care of the elderly and, of course, cooking in the kitchen. Women only entered the elders' board room when they were bringing in coffee and snacks, all of which, even in middle school, I knew that I did not want to do.

In the anthology, *Korean Feminists in Conversation with the Bible, Church and Society,* Yani Yoo entitled her chapter "Women's Leadership Fragmented: Examples in the Bible and the Korean Church", and stated that women's leadership was fragmented in the Korean Church by means of a variety of strategies (Yoo 2011, 101). Women were silenced or punished, women's leadership was described "as a submission that willingly serves male interests in upholding patriarchy", women were given stereotypically female gender roles, and women were seen as good leaders when they "speak and act against their own interests." (Yoo 2011, 101) Consider the following statistics:

> According to a survey (1995) by the Committee of Gender Equality of the National Council of Churches in Korea, women's activities consisted of cooking and cleaning (51%), choir (10.1%), class meeting (9.9%), visitation (8.9%), preparation work for events (7.3%), evangelism (5.2%),

> and education (0.2%). Only 0.3% of the respondents liked cooking and cleaning. From the statistics and survey we see that the miracle workers behind the gigantic Korean Church have not been given deserved places of leadership. (Yoo 2011, 113)

While the survey is 25 years old, it is significant that in 1995, I was just entering into high school and what she describes was exactly what I saw. Interestingly, Yoo also suggests that, "When a church does not include adult women as leaders, there is no leadership place for young adults, youth, and children. Not giving leadership positions and power to young people has been the major reason for the decrease of young people in the church, as many studies point out" (Yoo 2011, 103). While I didn't consider leaving the church, Yoo's insight helped me understand why the thought of ordained ministry didn't cross my mind when I felt the call to Christian vocation.

Furthermore, from my personal experience on the peninsula (2006-2009) and in the Korean diaspora churches around the world (United States, 2004-2005; Canada, 2009-2016; Australia, 2012; Singapore, 2016-2017), it strikes me that the needle has shifted much too little. Hence, when I shared my personal calling with my mom at sixteen (1997), she was greatly concerned because she knew how hard it would be to become a respected female pastor and leader in the Korean church community. She also knew my personality and how she and my father had raised me and recognized that there would be challenges, to say the least, ahead. At sixteen, being born, raised, and educated in Canada, I simply could not fathom what those challenges would be.

The Greater God Narrative in a Leadership Journey

My personal leadership journey seemed to start with my parents, their Korean heritage, their decision to immigrate, their bold choice to get married in Canada, and their resolve to raise my brother and I in Canada to know both the western and eastern cultures. Later on, I discovered that my grandmothers from both sides of the family had long been praying for one of their children to become a preaching and teaching pastor. None of my aunts or uncles ever did and neither did my parents. When during my seminary years, my parents shared with me about both my grandmothers' prayers, I felt so appropriately small. I realized then that my leadership journey did not begin when I felt the calling at thirteen or even with my parents. No one person is just born in a vacuum but rather in some connected context, as part of the greater God-ordained narrative. I understood more deeply the words of Psalm 139 where the Psalmist proclaims:

> **13** For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. **14** I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. **15** My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. **16** Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:13-16)

Leadership, then, is also realizing that I am connected to a story greater than just one earthly lifespan. In fact, it goes back several generations, and in my case, to the women of my family line. The genealogies found throughout the Bible, including Jesus' own found in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, are incredibly significant in showing that God is a generational God, and an important part of my own

Christian leadership is recognizing not only my place in the generations but also who I am because of them. Barton writes:

> Before calling has anything to do with *doing,* it has everything to do with *being* that essence of yourself that God knew before the foundations of the earth, that God called into being and that God alone truly knows. It is the call to be who we are and at the same time to become more than we can yet envision. (Barton 2008, 77)

There is a distinctly individual nature to one's leadership in *being,* but our *being* is also intrinsically connected to those who have *been* before us. In other words, we are shaped by those who came before us and our calling is intrinsically connected to those who were called and led even before we were born. Consider the life of Joseph—he had no idea where God was going to lead him and how his adolescent dreams were directly connected with God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, his own direct patrilineal fathers (Genesis 37). Four hundred years later, Moses was raised up as the leader through whom God will deliver Israel from Egypt (Exodus 1-3). King David's genealogy connected him to his great-grandmother, Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4:18-22). Even John the Baptist, before he was born, had a plan and purpose for his life (Luke 1) and Jesus was, of course, the prophesied Messiah. Hence, the Christian leader becomes more than what she "can yet envision" precisely because her leadership is not a stand-alone phenomenon but rather a part of a series of callings and leadership journeys throughout the generations. For me, the spiritual connection to the Christian women in my family, namely, the faith and strength of my grandmothers, was significant.

Because I was so young, I had only begun to grasp the notion that God really was intentional and purposeful with every aspect of my life. Even if it was

not my decision to be born to my Korean Canadian immigrant parents, it was his. Thus, in the fullest sense of the word, leadership, the formation of a leader's character and the refining of her calling, is a journey that begins before birth. The body in which we were born, ethnicity and gender included, was not a mistake but part of God's divine will. This was a very difficult and emotional truth that I had to reconcile. I knew that I was loved by God but I could not understand why he would make me a female and yet place such a distinct calling on my life in the cultural context I was in. I remember a conversation with my mom when she told me that it was a relief I was born in the modern world and in Canada. The opportunities for women in pre-war, and post-war, Korea were much more limited. My logical plan, therefore, was to avoid formal ordained ministry leadership. I could easily have skirted the issue by going down an academic track and becoming an Old Testament scholar who served in leadership by teaching in the academy and not in the local church. Koreans respected a PhD, male or female.

Inspiration from the Stories of Others

I had never spoken to anyone about my experiences in the Korean diaspora church because it didn't seem like it bothered anyone else. On the surface, it didn't seem like other women had the same problems I had because everyone just went with the flow. However, I eventually started thinking, "Surely, I *can't* be the only one." I have been so grateful for the Korean American women who shared their stories in *Here I Am: Faith Stories of Korean American Clergywomen*. I had come across this anthology in my preliminary readings and it

formed the foundations of my action research project. As I read through their experiences, I saw myself in each chapter and understood to the core of my being every struggle and difficulty they were sharing. On a few occasions, I could even tell what was going to happen next. The stories were *that* familiar to me.

The fact that their stories resonated with me so deeply made me want to explore leadership experiences in my own context with my peers, friends, and spiritual sisters. I was extremely interested in hearing their stories and creating a space where we could talk openly and without judgement. I had never felt the desire or need to explore this before but with my recent experience of being referred to as "too Asian," I wanted to see if probing deeper into our cultural upbringing with a group would reveal to us how and to what degree we and our views on leadership were shaped by our culture. This was the beginning of my action research project design.

Because my leadership experience was predominantly in the Korean diaspora church, I chose to explore the cultural challenges in that ministry context. I also realized that in addition to serving in the Korean diaspora church for 15 years, and because I had also grown up in that community, a lot of that influence was internalized into who I am today. Hence, in a very real sense, who I had become was also my ministry context. In other words, I always took my ministry context with me regardless of whether or not I was serving in the Korean diaspora church. As I began my preliminary readings for my research project, I quickly realized the truth of Kim's statement: "Korean churches in general are

patriarchal institutions, based on a family-centered paradigm, and so directly affect the development of a woman's self-image." (Kim 1996, 75)

Confucian Gender Ideology

In order to understand the cultural dynamics of the Korean diaspora church, a brief overview of Confucian influence on Korean culture is necessary. Traditional Korean culture is rooted in Confucian philosophy, which was established by the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) when Confucianism became a "ruling principle" in Korean society (Kim 1996, 5-6). One of the key principles of Confucian philosophy is dualism that resulted in a strictly prescribed male-female gender ideology:

> Confucianism, to a large degree, is the invisible weave that sets the societal norms and values by which people abide. Interestingly, reference to women by Confucius is sparse. In the *Analects*, Confucius writes: "Women and servants are hard to deal with" (*Analects*, 17.25). This particular passage clearly implies that Confucius understood women to be in a different and inferior social class than men...He depicts the woman's role primarily in context to kinship to the male figure–daughter, sister, wife, mother, sister-in-law, mother-in-law, and grandmother. Confucius' *Book of Rites* 禮記 (*Liji*) emphasized the separation of women from men even within the home; the outer section belonged to the men, and the woman stayed within the inner section (*Liji* 10.12). In the *Book of Documents* 書經 (*Shujing*), a stronger statement illuminates that a wayward woman had the potential to destroy the family: "The hen does not announce the morning. The crowing of a hen in the morning (indicates) the subversion of the family" (*Shujing* 2.2). Mencius, a pupil of Confucius, writes that the worst of unfilial acts is the failure to continue the ancestral line (Mencius, 4A.26). (Chan & Pak 2020, 1-2)

Hence, the Asian focus on the male progenitor and the importance of firstborn sons. This clearly defined gender-ideology undergirded, quite literally and

comprehensively, every part of society. It was formalised in *The Book of Changes* 易經 (*Yijing*), second century BCE, in which the woman's role was summed up as follows: "The woman's proper place is inside 內 (*nei*) the family, and the proper place for the man is outside 外 (*wai).*" (Chan & Pak 2020, 2) In fact, because of the significant influence of Chinese language and culture on the Korean peninsula, some of the Korean words that are still used, though admittedly less often, for wife are "jip-sa-ram" (집사람), which points to the person who lives inside the home, i.e., the domestic sphere, and "ahn-sa-ram" (안사람), meaning, "person on the inside/inner sphere." (Chan & Pak 2020, 3)

To provide further historical context, when missionaries arrived on the Korean peninsula, their efforts to share the Gospel reinforced Confucian gender ideology. While missionaries like American Methodist Mary Fitch Scranton, encouraged the education of women, even founding Korea's first school for women, *Ewha Hakdang,* in 1886 (Kim 1996, 13), their Christian ideals of womanhood were informed by traditional 19th century Victorian values. These values merged much too well with the established Confucian principles, which meant that the most meaningful reforms in education affected men, whereas women were ultimately educated to become better housewives (Kim 1996, 14). In her book that explores the dynamics of gender and missions in Korea, Choi explains how both the, "…American missionaries and Korean intellectuals participated in the rhetoric of gender equality as a new moral principle for the modern era" (Choi 2009, 43). However, despite their enlightened rhetoric, both

groups "…continued to relegate women to the domestic sphere as the subordinate gender" (Choi 2009, 44). Hence, Choi concludes, "Consequently, one finds contradictions between the rhetoric of gender equality and the practices which continued institutionalized gender inequality" (Choi 2009, 44). Similarly, Kim also concludes, "In retrospect, early Christianity and modern education in Korea failed to challenge, but rather confirmed the traditional self-images of Korean women, even as they introduced modern knowledge to those women" (Kim 1996, 15).

Portfolio: The Narrative Arc

My portfolio will take you through my personal journey as a younger Korean Canadian female leader in the Korean diaspora church context and the action research project that it inspired. The next chapter will describe the ministry context and the current situation for young women leaders in the Korean diaspora church. It will also explain the cultural dynamics and share the lived experiences of Korean diaspora women leaders. It outlines what I consider to be the strengths that young women bring as leaders to the Korean diaspora church and also the challenges that prevent them from fully expressing, engaging, and applying themselves as leaders.

Chapter 3 details my own personal philosophy of leadership. I take the time to share about my upbringing in light of God's sovereignty and how it led to leadership experiences in the Korean diaspora church, including the challenges that I faced as a younger Korean female pastor. I also briefly examined some Biblical passages on female leaders that were personally important in my

development before explaining my philosophy of Christian leadership and the practices that strengthen the core of authentic leadership.

The next chapter presents the action research project beginning with the research question and opportunity, participant recruitment, definition of key terms, ethics, context, models, and resources. This chapter also outlines methodology and methods and shares the research findings, interpretations, and outcomes. Many of the stories shared during the research study through both the one-on-one interviews and the online forum weren't surprising and many were. What was surprising was how common and familiar the experiences were for everyone and our responses as this realization dawned on us. The whole experience was much more emotional than I had expected.

Finally, the concluding chapter comes full circle and provides some final thoughts and reflections on how this journey has affected me and where it has brought me personally. From being enlightened and encouraged by the stories our research group shared to learning to embrace the fullness of God's calling in my life, writing this portfolio has shifted my paradigm of what my strongest leadership looks like. I've also become much more comfortable in asking questions about the established systems that have been, inadvertently or otherwise, limiting to women leaders.

Growing up, I wasn't aware of all these cultural norms, influences, and systems that would shape and form me. I don't think any child is. But now, at this stage of my life, I can't ignore these factors and I feel better equipped as a leader for recognizing and acknowledging them. In fact, because I now know, I can't

unsee them. My hope is that this portfolio will take you through the journey that so many young Korean Canadian women face as they look for leadership opportunities in their local home church. My hope is that when other young women come across this research study, they too will discover that they are not alone and that their voice matters. My hope is that when others from all walks of life read this portfolio, we will find more allies and advocates for those rising young women who are called to lead in their specific ministry context.

CHAPTER 2:

MINISTRY CONTEXT: BEING KOREAN, BEING CANADIAN, BEING FEMALE

Introduction

This chapter of my portfolio offers a glimpse into my ministry context, who I am and how I grew up. In this sense, ministry context doesn't refer to a specific church or organization but rather the ethno-cultural context into which I was born and that I carry with me wherever I go as a Korean Canadian female leader who has been a part of the Korean diaspora church my whole life. Though I don't currently serve in a Korean church, my ties to the community are innate to who I am. To that end, this chapter includes an examination of the factors that have contributed to the unique characteristics of the Korean diaspora church community and the cultural context that shaped my leadership journey.

Description

Growing up, I repeatedly heard that when Koreans immigrate, "…the Koreans build churches." (Bae 2015, 84) This is also confirmed by Kim in her research writing that for Korean immigrants, "[The Korean] church plays a central role in the adaptation process of these immigrants and is without doubt personally significant in their lives" (Kim 1996, 67). Simply put, the centrality of the local Korean Church in the formation of these immigrant launching pad communities

shaped our identity and upbringing. In fact, it is precisely this central role of the church in the Korean diaspora community that uniquely contributes to the struggles of young Korean diaspora women leaders. In the preface of her book *Women Struggling for a New Life* (Kim 1996), Ai Ra Kim writes about her own experience and suggests that Korean immigrant women have been negatively impacted in all areas of their lives because of the influence and central role of the church in the Korean community:

> There are still numerous Korean immigrant women who are taking religion, Christianity, as their opium in order to escape from the unbearable sexual oppression at home, in the church (the major Korean community center) and in society in general. The church, implicitly and explicitly, supplies the justifying principles of women's institutional sexism at home, in the church, in Korean immigrant community, and in society. (Kim 1996, x)

In other words, though the church justified the principles that oppressed women, Korean Christian women remained in the church so that they could find strength to persevere. One wonders how this immigrant history has trickled down to affect young women in the Korean diaspora church today. Many Korean diaspora women like myself have grown up in the local Korean church and have been shaped, for better or for worse, by our experiences in this community. Still, Bae echoes our sentiments when she states, "The Korean immigrant church is my second home." (Bae 2015, 80)

If the local school was where we immersed ourselves in study during the week—just as our parents filled their weekdays with blue collar work and small businesses, e.g., convenience stores, dry cleaners, video rental stores—the weekend was a frenzy of Korean activities within the church community that,

despite the lesser number of hours, were possibly more formative for who we have become today. The Korean church, for so many of us, was the centre of the community. Kim suggests that, historically, there are four sociological functions of the Korean immigrant church: fellowship (meeting people and making friends), social service (sharing of community information), conference of social status (especially for the men), and strengthening of Korean identity through the preservation of Korean culture and traditions (language, holidays, festivals, etc.) (Kim 1996, 67). In this way, our local church was an influential force in our formative childhood years and affects who we are today.

Additionally, many second generation Korean kids grew up as one of the few Koreans in their predominantly "white" schools; hence, the Korean church also served as a place where we were not the "other." The following extended excerpt from Bae describes how many of us felt about our local Korean church:

> By the time I turned thirteen and was old enough to join the youth group, my attachment to the Korean church had only intensified. Friday night, with its youth group meetings, became my favorite time of the week, with Sunday being the second…Being one of the few Asians at my local high school in Richmond, Virginia, I felt like a minority. Church, however, was different. I was nobody at school, but I was somebody at church. My church, the Korean American faith community, was a place for me to grow, both spiritually and emotionally…The Korean church, in essence, gave me an identity that I could claim proudly. It was at church that I had the entire day to spend with friends who looked like me, had names similar to mine, and shared the same complaints about their ethnocentric parents. At church there was no need to explain my ethnic origin or even be asked if I was Chinese or Japanese. I did not have to explain the kind of after-school snacks found in our pantry or defend taking off my shoes upon entering the house. Time at church was time to be myself without having to worry about what my non-Korean peers thought of me. As a child and later as a teenager, my home church, always a Korean one, was

> simply that—home. (Bae 2015, 82)

As Bae describes, youth group night was always Fridays (still, to this day!) so as not to get in the way of studying on school nights and, in addition to the social community, the local Korean church was also where faith was planted and explored. This is certainly a good description of my own experience in the Korean Canadian church community. Yet, despite the wonderful memories of growing up in the Korean church, as I got older, there existed a frustrating love-hate tension. For some odd reason, while the rest of society recognized my achievements and acknowledged both my maturity and age, in the Korean community I was considered a perpetual youngster and junior and this was further exacerbated by the fact that I was female. After overcoming the trials and struggles of establishing myself as a professional Korean Canadian woman, it was maddening to return to a context where I was talked down to and patronized. As a young Korean American woman in pastoral ministry, Bae honestly admitted that she was tempted to run away from the home she once knew—she had outgrown everything that she loved about the Korean church and found herself in a passive-aggressive, hypocritical, patronizing, and hierarchical environment (Bae 2015, 82). Kim also shared the anecdotes of Young Ran Oh, a successful business woman, and Jai Mi Suh, a medical doctor, who were invited to be part of boards in their local church but both ended up resigning because they realized they really didn't have a voice (Kim 1996, 73). Here are Suh's own words:

> I was an administrative board member, but I resigned. You know, the church still wants women to be silent. A few times, I spoke up in the meetings. Gee, people looked at me fiercely. Their eyes seemed to be saying, "Woman! Shut up and sit down." For a while, I tried to be silent at

> the meetings, but sometimes I was frustrated and couldn't stand it. It was awfully hard just sitting like a statue, not expressing my ideas. But men don't want to listen to women. It was frustrating and also a waste of my time, sitting like a dumb person. Am I just a chair filling up empty space? Instead of sitting there like a dumb chair, I resigned. (Kim 1996, 73)

What exacerbated the situation for Korean diaspora women was that there had been a stereotyping of Asian women by the dominant majority culture. In her BBC article, "The Docility Myth Flattening Asian Women's Careers," Christine Ro referenced a study where, "…of Asian American women who had experienced discrimination, 34% reported that others had assumed they were submissive or passive" (Ro 2017). Her article continues:

> Gender and race intersect to create an especially fraught position for Asian women. One study of five Silicon Valley companies showed that while white women and Asian men were also under-represented at the highest levels, Asian women were the least likely to be executives, relative to their proportion of the workforce. "The 'Asian effect' is 3.7X greater than the 'gender effect' as a glass ceiling factor", the report notes. The persistent belief that Asian American women will maintain the status quo and can be saddled with extra work without complaining has led to a situation where many of these women have high educational and career achievements, yet plateau. Women in these groups report not being credited for their work, taking on the bulk of group projects, being held to a higher standard and yet still not being considered leaders, as they're relegated to the "team players" zone. (Ro 2017)

The study that Ro referenced also identified 6 types of discrimination which were specific to the intersectionality of race and gender for Asian American women (Mukkamala and Suyemoto 2018). These 6 types saw Asian American women labelled as exotic, not a leader, submissive, cute and small, invisible, and a service worker (Mukkamala and Suyemoto 2018). Moreover, Ro also quoted human

resource development researcher at Indiana University Bloomington, Yonjoo Cho, who offered additional insight:

> Due to the cultural context of Korea, women feel pressured to do as [well] as male counterparts but, at the same time, they feel they should not excel [so as] not to be highly visible so that they don't get criticised due to their token status in the organization. (Ro 2017)

Thus, Korean diaspora women of faith not only faced cultural challenges within their local church community but also needed to deal with this "Asian effect" in the greater society—and both serve to reinforced the other. Grace Ji-Sun Kim shared her own experience:

> I am never viewed or understood as simply a 'woman,' but I am viewed and defined as an 'Asian American woman.' As a result, I am continually viewed as inferior to white women and understood as the other. My identity becomes tied to my physical body in ways that are never applied to those in power or those making rules. (Kim 2015, 52)

Similarly, in 2021, I have been told that I speak English "very well" and that I was not what people "expected"—which begs the question, "What did they expect?" Perhaps the following is a more "expected" description of Asian women:

> Asian American woman are often stereotyped as quiet, subservient, and subordinate women. If I act outside of this stereotypical norm, I become a target and viewed as a 'bad' person. For example, if I speak up and point out wrongful acts that are happening, I often get accused for the wrongful acts rather than the perpetrators themselves. Too often, I am blamed for things for which my white friends or acquaintances would never be blamed. This is easily done as I am viewed as a foreigner and am often scapegoated for others' problems. If I point out such discrimination to my friends, they sometimes label me as a troublemaker. If I keep the experience to myself, they think, "She never mentions any, so there must be no discrimination." I'm in a no-win situation." (Kim 2015, 56)

It matters that Korean diaspora women have felt this way in their home country. The challenge was compounded when we could not even find our place in our own local Korean diaspora church, the very community that provided us with a home away from home during our childhood and adolescent years. Laura Mariko Cheifetz, a bi-racial woman of Japanese and Jewish descent, observed:

> Thanks to the ways in which our own churches treat us, Asian Pacific American women, but particularly Korean American women, face a different set of options: Serve in the Korean American church community and work through Confucianism confused with Christianity, or serve in the dominant culture church community and struggle with facing discrimination based on accent, culture, and race. (Cheifetz 2015, 157)

Cheifetz further adds:

> Too often, Korean American clergywomen are told that *who they are is wrong*. They have an accent that is too immigrant-sounding, or they don't speak Korean. They are women. Some are not married, or if married, don't have children. They don't look like pastors. They are too young. Some are told they will struggle serving a dominant culture church because they grew up in a Korean church, while others who did not grow up in the Korean church are questioned about their level of Korean-ness. (Cheifetz 2015, 157, *Italics mine*)

Kim was right, this certainly seemed like a "no-win" situation for Korean diaspora women; western society expected us to be passive and submissive and, as the research findings demonstrated, our Korean diaspora community assumed the same.

Irene Pak also observed how Confucianism permeated the entire Korean culture and society, even reaching across the Pacific to the immigrant diaspora communities and intruding beyond the walls of the church (Kim 1996, 144 & Pak 2015, 133). Like the proverbial fish in water, we grew up greatly influenced—

unknowingly, as it was packaged quite seamlessly with Korean Christianity—by the dualistic Confucian teachings of patriarchy that emphasized gender roles. Men were superior to women and were responsible for public work outside the home whereas women were "primarily defined as mothers, confined to the domestic sphere." (Kim 2017, 45) What was also troublesome was that traditional evangelical values reinforced the Confucian system and Pak lamented the inability of the Korean Church to separate cultural values from biblical principles:

> Within the context of the Korean American church, I wonder when we will come to a point where we stop confusing Confucianism with Christianity. For now, we respect the role of pastor, but we are not sure what to do when that pastor is a woman or younger or single. (Pak 2015, 133)

Thus, by being Korean, female, and accomplished, we now *embody* an uncomfortable predicament—how do you solve a problem like the younger Korean Canadian (single) female leader in the diaspora church?

The Unique Strengths We Bring

The community of young Korean Canadian Christian women that made up my ministry context had many strengths and much to offer. Many were highly educated professionals, capable, and acknowledged in their respective workplaces. Moreover, their experience in both the Korean Christian community and their vocation provided them with life experience that equipped them to navigate both worlds and positioned them as bridges between cultures, perhaps even generations. My goal was to tap into this bi-cultural experience, difficult as it may have been and continues to be, to reflect on how those experiences shaped

us and to explore how we could move forward in creating space for young women leaders in the Korean diaspora community.

Understanding the Cultural and Linguistic Nuances of Both Cultures

Most of the young women who participated in the research study were born in Canada or came at a very early age and were brought up in homes that reinforced the Korean culture and language. Hence, while more comfortable in the Canadian context, these young women also knew how to carry themselves appropriately in the Korean context. It was, after all, our home away from home. A couple of the participants were born in Korea and had come to Canada as young adults, but they could navigate the Canadian context with ease. Either way, they were linguistically and culturally fluent in both the local Korean community and the broader Canadian society.

However, this bi-cultural positioning and understanding had also proven to be a point of frustration and struggle. After growing up and being educated in the Western culture, despite the discrimination, they returned to the Korean church hoping to find support only to find it even more frustrating and stifling. Pak, who was born and raised in Ogden, Utah, explained her struggle in the Korean diaspora church:

> The fact that I culturally understand the phrase, "I'm sorry, but women must be considered last," used when it comes to nominating elders within some Korean churches, does not make it okay. Actually, the fact that I "understand" it is what bothers me the most. That I as the pastor have to fight over and over for our faithful youth to be allowed to become full members of the church with the full right to vote in congregational meetings (let alone be considered for nomination to any leadership role) frustrates me to no end. How long do we remain silent? How long do we

> remain patient? How long do we remain bent? How long is it okay to keep others bent and silent? (Pak 2015, 133)

Still, despite the double-edged nature of understanding both cultures, I counted this as a strength because it meant that these young women understood (1) the nuances of both cultures, (2) the difficulties that came with the clashing of cultural values, and (3) the struggles of carving out one's dual identity. Most significantly, because the women understood both cultures, it afforded them the opportunity to choose, as difficult and frustrating it may have been, to make a difference for future generations.

Educated, Knowledgeable, and Professionally Accomplished

As previously mentioned, the young women who participated in the research study were highly educated and accomplished, having graduated from some of the best Canadian universities such as the University of Toronto, McMaster University, University of Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier University, University of Western Ontario, York University, and Queen's University. In other words, the women who struggled with the glass-ceiling of leadership in the Korean diaspora church were lawyers, teachers, pastors, accountants, businesswomen, doctors (in various fields), media personalities, and civil servants. Hence, their frustration was understandable as they tried to navigate their home culture where traditional gender roles were still part of how things were done. The participants were intelligent women who were making the most of their opportunity while, at the same time, looking to hold on to that which was precious and meaningful about their Korean Christian heritage. Their reflections,

comments, and overall participation in the research study were enlightening and insightful.

The Challenges We Face

There were obvious challenges we faced in this ministry context which largely stemmed from cultural values, biases, and assumptions. As the research group gathered to share our stories, one of the goals was to identify together what these cultural challenges were. The findings from the research study will be presented in more detail in chapter 4, however, below are the experiential challenges that I faced, which inspired me towards this research project.

Cultural Gender Roles & Patriarchy

Every Korean girl experienced the pressure of Korean gender norms from the moment she was born. If she was the first child, there was bound to be disappointment somewhere in the family ranks as sons were still favoured. At the age of cognition, we began to live out and curb our aspirations accordingly, and when we became actively aware of these cultural assumptions, we could either choose to live by them or challenge them.

Consider the reflections of Minhee Kim-Kort and how her observations about her own mother influenced her as a theologian, pastor, and new mother. Kim-Kort wrote, "Growing up and watching my mother be the primary caregiver, I had assumed that all women were mothers, or at least destined to be mothers, and the church I grew up in gave me even more mothers. Every Korean woman was a kind of mother to us children" (Kim-Kort 2015, 44). It was a wonderful part

of the Korean Church community to have so many "mothers." On Sundays, food was plentiful; the church kitchen was full of chatter and laughter, Sunday School and Vacation Bible School were never lacking delicious Korean snacks. Still, this was a double-edged sword for the girls who grew to want something different for themselves from the church kitchen. Even in the home, many wives and mothers are expected to fall in line with the traditional gender norms that they witnessed throughout their childhood years. As Kim-Kort grew as a mother and theologian, she, "vacillated between bucking against cultural pressure to be the perfect and willing stay-at-home mom and embracing this as an opportunity to experience and live into greater faithfulness" (Kim-Kort 2015, 49).

Three of the participants in my research study were also mothers with young families and struggled with the very same tension. The reality that traditional evangelical values and Confucian gender norms were too readily and seamlessly absorbed by the Korean church could not be ignored and it would not be an exaggeration to state that the re-domestication of women was reinforced by these two influences. As Kim-Kort struggled with her own understanding of job descriptions, she remembered when her father entered into the pastoral ministry later in life:

> I could only think of my mother, who was always a homemaker and then eventually became a second-career pastor's wife when my father became a pastor late in life. The hierarchy didn't change much in their relationship, and they became even more entrenched in their roles because of this new job. (Kim-Kort 2015, 46)

It seemed to me that just when Kim-Kort's mother was about to break free from a domestic lifestyle, her husband's choice to become a pastor forced her to double

down and re-domesticate for his second career. In her chapter, "Go Somewhere Else," Christine Hong recounted a truly heart-breaking experience where the senior pastor of her Korean church told her to go somewhere else for an ordination service. It would have gone without saying that she could have had it in this church if she were male (Hong 2015, 58). She candidly wrote of her experience:

> Gender had been an issue in the past. When discerning my call during my college years, I approached mentors and church leaders with hopes of affirmation. Instead, I heard, "You aren't practical enough for ministry" or "Isn't what you really feel a call to be a pastor's wife?" Only later did I realize being "practical" meant being male. I also came to wonder how many pastors' wives had felt a call to ordained ministry but had settled for marrying a pastor instead of becoming a pastor themselves. (Hong 2015, 58)

My own experiences in the Korean church context have been laced with patronizing, passive-aggressive remarks. These experiences and the literature that I have read revealed that most young Korean women had the exact same experience as Hong. Many also had the same paradoxical desire to return and serve in their Korean diaspora communities (Hong 2015, 62). The following was worth quoting in its entirety in order to grasp the kind of humiliation and exasperation that young women in the Korean diaspora church had to endure:

> The interviews were bizarre. They usually started with "So, how old are you anyway?" or "Are your parents okay with this?" Some congregations asked if I could play the piano, if I liked children, or if I planned on getting married any time in the near future. When I admitted that I was not that great with children and they made me nervous, and that secretly I was afraid I might drop them, the conversations ended abruptly. When I asked why they posed these questions, the response was, "Well, women follow their husbands when they get married, so you wouldn't stay here long." One interview ended with an elderly Korean American pastor giving me a

> paternalistic pat on my rear end as I left his office. He handed me a hundred dollar bill, saying, "Go have something good to eat." The worst was when one interviewer asked if I had any ambitions to become a senior minister some day. Initially, I thought that this was a prodding encouragement, as if to say that I should be thinking about such things. However, I realized that he was checking to see if I would fall in line. He was checking to see if I would try to reach beyond the boundaries set for me. Through it all, humiliating and strange as it was, I felt it: the call that obscure but firm feeling that, even with the odds stacked against me, the Spirit would bring me together with the right congregation and the right people. (Hong 2015, 58)

Hong further wrote:

> After a long series of interviews, a congregation made me an offer, but it was conditional. Even though I had passed my ordination exams and been declared "ready to receive a call" by the presbytery, it was becoming increasingly evident that this did not mean much to the people I hoped to impress. The congregation's offer was a probationary one. I had one year to prove that I could do this job, fulfill this call as a woman, and fulfill it as a woman who, in their eyes, was too young. If the year passed without incident, they would ordain me. I accepted. I struggled feverishly that year. Little things hurt the most. There was the time I was not allowed to drive the church van; I had to find a man to drive the youth group around. There was the time I literally had my hand slapped because I gave a blessing at the end of a youth service that looked far too much like a benediction. There was the time I was told to cut my hair shorter, wear less makeup, and dress more modestly. The latter hurt the most because it came from a group of well-meaning women who claimed they saw me as a daughter and they would not want their daughter running around that way. It shamed and angered me because I thought about how my own mother would feel if she heard those kinds of statements about her daughter. (Hong 2015, 59)

My honest reaction to this anecdote was, "What the heck was that?" There was also a selfish and paradoxical frustration-relief tension. Frustration because, as ridiculous as they were, experiences like this really happened; relief because I realized that I was not alone. I thought back to some of the questions I was asked

when I was interviewed for a pastoral position, "How did you get ordained when you're not married?", "Do you have plans to get married?", "How old are you?" I also remembered the biting, sarcastic reply that was at the tip of my tongue, and ironically, it was the same Korean cultured-ness that helped me restrain those words. It was extremely challenging that the traditional Korean gender norms were reinforced by the patriarchal hierarchy of the Korean church. The results were the discouragement of crushed dreams and a stifled voice, the lack of self-confidence in leadership, and the bearing of the burden of lesser-ness because you were female.

Lack of Senior Korean Women Leaders in the Korean Church

This second challenge was a result of the first. The struggle for women's ordination in the Korean Presbyterian Church on the peninsula began in 1933 and it was not until October 21st, 1995 that the Women Ministers Association of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPC) were finally granted the approval for the women's ordination amendment (Lee 2015, 21). As a Korean American woman seeking ordination in the early 90's, Choi shared about how her own ordination process caused quite the hullabaloo:

> As a result, in 1992, I became the first female clergy ordained by the Korean Language Presbytery of PC(USA). That was again a miracle of God! At the time, it was virtually impossible for a woman to be called as a pastor in the Korean church context. It was even more difficult for women to pursue ordination in Korean-language presbyteries. I later learned that the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on the Preparation of Ministry of the Presbytery underwent conflict and schism on the issue of my ordination as a woman. However, God intervened and decided to place me in the place where the Lord had planned and called. People called it a

"miracle." (Choi 2015, 122)

The lack of women leaders in the Korean Christian community who could both set an example and mentor other young women leaders was woeful. In her review of Korean American Presbyterian Clergywomen, Unzu Lee wrote:

> Those of us who are currently engaged [in ministry] are serving in the following contexts: 34 as teaching elders in parishes (15 in Korean immigrant churches, 17 white or multiethnic churches, and 2 in Korea); 14 as chaplains in hospitals, hospices, university, and the military; 7 as faculty in theological schools (2 in Korea); 5 in specialized ministries through nonprofit agencies; 3 as missionaries; and 3 as executives in PC(USA) agencies. Among those who are working in parishes, only one is a head of staff, and a number of them are working part-time as temporary supply. (Lee 2015, 25)

Lee continued to comment on a few unique traits of Korean American women ministers in the following observations:

- Korean American clergywomen are a heterogeneous group. Those who work in the parish make up less than a half of the total number. A great number of Korean American women in ministry are engaged in so-called specialized ministries.
- Among those who are in the parish, more women are serving predominantly white or multiethnic congregations than Korean immigrant churches.
- The number of Korean American clergywomen who are serving in Korean immigrant churches make up less than 20 percent of the total number, and among them, one-third are involved in either children's or English ministry.
- Korean American women in ministry are highly educated.
- A significant number of Korean American women in ministry are in the childbearing and childrearing stage of their lives. Unlike most men in ministry, a great number of Korean American women in ministry choose to take a leave from ministry to care for their child/children. This leave ranges from a few months to ten years or more. (Lee 2015, 25)

About her own observations mentioned above, Lee further commented:

> These traits, even in a limited way, inform us about the situation of Korean American women in ministry. Though many of us are products of the Korean immigrant churches, many of us are not serving Korean Presbyterians. One clergywoman who is currently serving a predominantly white congregation yearns, "I really want to retire having served at least one Korean congregation as a solo or senior pastor." At age fifty, she has been in ministry for more than two decades. Will she be granted that opportunity during her lifetime? (Lee 2015, 26)

While using these Korean American examples, I acknowledged that personally, I had yet to see a Korean Canadian female senior pastor of a Korean church. Even if she was ordained and earned a doctorate degree, she was usually the senior pastor's wife and was given the traditional duties of overseeing the Women's Ministry and Children's Education. For all the professional and accomplished young women that attended a Korean Canadian church, there was a glaringly disproportionate number of women leaders in senior positions of church leadership in either the pastoral or lay categories. The result was that when people thought of "pastor", women were not in the picture. Pak confessed that even though she herself was a Korean American female pastor, when she heard the word "pastor," even she did not think of an Asian American woman (Pak 2015, 133). I also felt the same.

There was also an interesting and noteworthy tension amongst the first-generation women regarding women pastors and female leaders in the Church. One group was completely supportive and felt a vicarious liberation through the achievements of those women who attained leadership in the Korean church. Kim shared her own experience:

> It has been my experience that women of all ages, but older women in particular, become exhilarated and even declare gratitude to God for this

> expansion of women's roles and statues within the United Methodist Church. Many times, after preaching or leading a worship service, I have been warmly and tightly embraced by older women who come forth from the pews with tears and exclamations of happiness at being with an ordained woman minister. (Kim 1996, 147)

I have had the very same experience on more than a few occasions. On the other hand, there were Korean women, mostly middle-aged and first-generation, who refused to recognize the legitimacy of female leaders in the church. Kim noted several past experiences with first-generation Korean women who believed women should still be silent in church, not permitted to teach over men and, in one case, that women were simply inferior to men as demonstrated by the order of Creation (Kim 1996, 148). One older Korean woman, a physician, was deeply offended at the notion of a female pastor, going as far as to declare, "How dare a woman be a minister? I don't trust women ministers!" (Kim 1996, 149)

Is there no room then for accomplished young women who want to be leaders in the Korean Canadian church? Echoing Lee's words, we have indeed been invisible: "Many of us are separated from the Korean immigrant context by the generational and gender gap, and we wonder what role we might be able to play in the next forty years" (Lee 2015, 26). If the Korean diaspora church continues to hold on so tightly to these cultural values and traditions that formed the social construct for Korean women of previous generations, the young and rising Korean Canadian female leaders of the 21st century will find other opportunities where their God-given gifts and hard-earned skills will be put to better use.

Lack of Self-Confidence in Leadership, Bitterness and Resentment, Walking Away

Because of the cultural challenges, many young Korean Canadian Christian women either stopped attending a Korean church or resigned themselves to accepting the archaic cultural gender norms. It was baffling for me to see accomplished women subserviently serving coffee or making food in the kitchen and not taking part in meaningful leadership discussions. The very presence of women in a session meeting changed the dynamics so much that literally nothing got done or the women were completely ignored (Kim 1996, 72-73). As she recounted her Korean Christian family dynamic, Hee Kyung Kim described her father as the "well-meaning, patriarchal, and conservative Christian" who, in her own words, "ruled over my mother and his five children at home with 'God-given' power as a father" (Kim 2017, 43). Her mother, on the other hand, was the "unofficial yet real leader" who kept everything and everyone moving (Kim 2017, 43). This was the typical account of my female peers who grew up in the Korean church. The women were always in the kitchen, no matter what their professional vocation was, as the men, despite their lack of qualification, made decisions and all the "big speeches." Growing up, I could not recall a single woman who led a prayer or distributed the Communion on a Sunday during the worship service. What was more saddening was that they "knew their place", were too timid, and just could not imagine otherwise. When Kim's mother was elected as the President of the Women's Mission Club, she was still behind the scenes, cleaning and cooking for others in the kitchen (Kim 2017, 43).

Consequently, our sense of self-worth as women leaders was diminished before we even had the chance to consider leading. As we grew up in the limiting environment of the Korean diaspora church, women were not even given the option to consider themselves as candidates for positions of official authority or leadership. As she reflected on the role of her parents in the Korean Christian community, Kim candidly shared:

> I still find myself limited by these two images of leadership, thus struggling to envision myself as a leader. I am too shy to become an authoritative leader like my father and too selfish to become a self-sacrificial servant leader like my mother. I simply do not fit into either of these engrained types of leaders…Being neither authoritative and charismatic nor self-sacrificial and humble, I have had trouble embracing myself as a leader. This hinders my becoming a better leader, which is indeed problematic. (Kim 2017, 44)

There was more to leadership than the two gendered roles typified in the traditional Korean values. Still, because of the deep influence of our Korean cultural heritage, the lack of leadership opportunities resulted in bitterness and resentment towards the Korean church, and in self-doubt even when leadership opportunities were presented. There was a lonely self-exile that resulted and young Korean women, born in Canada but growing up in the Korean diaspora church, found themselves boxed in by the very church community they loved and therefore, questioned their calling to lead. Bae's honest confession about her own struggles with her home community struck a familiar chord:

> Yet, like an unexpected detour on the journey, this once-upon-a-happy-place of mine now has its way of infuriating the good church girl out of me, so much so that I want to run away from it—far, far away. I want to run away from the overt sexism and stifling nature of patriarchy found in the church. I want to run away from the ageism that works against me. I

> want to run away from the sometimes subtle but always telling way certain older adults have when they speak to me, or rather, speak at me. I want to run away from the uncritical dissemination of the Christian faith, creating indoctrinated church folk rather than fostering a faith-seeking-understanding generation of Christian thinkers. I want nothing to do with the singular, narrow agenda of conservative theology that values traditionalism over tradition. I want to distance myself from preachers who appear to love dogma over ethics, a suffocating homogenous community that makes no room for my LGBTQ friends, and a pervasive, uncritical practice of hierarchy. And I really want to stay away from adults who, having been spoiled by both their parents and culture, still expect women to remain ignorantly agreeable, alluringly quiet, and alarmingly thin. I want to run away from it all. I want to run away from this place I once loved and stay away, because sometimes it is easier to leave and find a new home than to fix the one in which you were raised. (Bae 2015, 83)

As I now consider my options, it is much easier to walk away. Why return to an environment that is patronizing at best and condescending at worst? The answer is as simple as it is difficult: because I am called. The challenge is to acknowledge God's hand in my life, prayerfully consider the future generations of both young women *and* men, and boldly stand firm, having the tough conversations, bearing the humiliation and shame, and insulating the emerging generation from the hurts while passing on the abundance of prayer, love and blessing that I also received from the Korean church.

Conclusion

It would be naïve to think that any ministry context could change so quickly; hence, I didn't expect to overhaul the Korean culture or force some sort of gender-equality-concession at a superficial level. Rather, my goal was to acknowledge my ministry context and create space to share, listen, and reflect on

the research group's experience in that ministry context. What resulted was a meaningful exploration of our stories, a recognition that we were not alone, and a resolve to be more attentive and intentional about how we carried ourselves as leaders in our own spheres of influence.

Indeed, I was not alone. There were many Korean diaspora women who, as leaders, had struggled to find their identity and voice in the Korean diaspora church. They were strong women whose stories could inspire us to gather and share our own stories, and not only for our own sake. In fact, our common experiences in the same ministry context provided for an ideal platform for coming together and sharing. This was something we could do, right now, where we were, in our own place of ministry and calling.

Personally, I realized that I could not ignore my ethnicity and culture. Because both were part of my personal leadership journey, they will always be a part of my ministry context. Neither could I ignore my calling to lead. If I am to be authentic in my personal identity and in my leadership journey, I must embrace my own personal story in the context of the greater cultural narrative of which I am a part.

As I developed my philosophy of Christian leadership, I realized that all leaders ought to stand tall, not in self-pride but being proud of all that God has created us to be, in our unique being and calling. Pak, who has faced and continues to face leadership challenges and cultural hurdles, expressed a confident resolve that all young Korean Canadian Christian women leaders, including me, could also adopt:

> It is still difficult at times, but nowadays I do stand tall (sometimes I even wear heels!), and I am proud of all that God has created me to be, as a Korean American, as a Christian, as a woman, as a pastor, and as a daughter of God. (Pak, 2015)

Frankly, it would do all leaders well to remember that authentic leadership always involves growth in self-awareness and personal transformation. For me, the first perspective that needed to change was how I viewed myself as a younger, Korean Canadian, female leader. The following chapter explores my philosophy of Christian leadership as I learned to embrace all of who God created me to be.

CHAPTER 3:

PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Framework of My Philosophy of Christian Leadership: Existence and Experience

The framework of my philosophy of Christian leadership was deeply rooted in both who I am as a person, a journey that I am still on, and my personal experience, which continues to accumulate with each passing day. My philosophy of Christian leadership continued to evolve and develop even as I conveyed what I had learned. This was my way of understanding leadership—a journey of self-discovery through reflective action and accomplished tasks, encouraging others in their own leadership journey. There certainly was biblical precedent in the life stories of spiritual leaders such as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Esther, and, of course, Jesus Christ, to name a few.

God has a vision and purpose for every individual and the lowly and insignificant of the world are significant to God and His purpose. God providentially weaves our lives together so that, for a moment or for an extended season, our lives travel the same road, ultimately, for his good purpose. He brings people together to lead and follow. These shared journeys, challenging though they may be, leave us as better people and more competent and compassionate leaders.

In their book, *Leading in Disorienting Times,* Nelson and Dickens wrote, "Effective leadership is a lifelong process of entwining techniques learned with the spiritual and emotional discipline that enables leaders to keep balance", which is connected to one's "ability to become oneself" (Nelson & Dickens 2015, 116). In the same vein, using my life as a template, this chapter explores how Christian leadership is born out of the person God created us to be and refined through the unique challenges, failures and triumphs that becomes our distinct journey of leadership formation. The leader who embraces both how God has created her and the circumstances that he allows in her life will be able to be more authentic in her own relationship with God, effective in her interactions with others, creative in her solutions to both technical and adaptive problems, and wiser as she draws from a deeper well of resilience in her responses to the challenges of leadership.

Formative Cultural Experiences: United States, Korea, Canada and Singapore

While in seminary, my first experience serving with a Korean American Church was in Boston and I felt that I had found a home away from home. There was a sense of familiarity throughout the global Korean diaspora communities. Wherever you went in the world, Korean immigrants had a certain culture and "feel" that made it a Korean community. However, I was not attending this church as a parishioner but was serving on staff as the youth pastor and I distinctly remembered one particular conversation that revealed to me the tip of the gender-ideology iceberg that I was going to have to face. We had been planning a domestic mission trip down to Jackson, Mississippi for the youth to

serve in the local African American communities and learn more about racial reconciliation, when we came upon the discussion of what was the best way to get down there. I had done this trip many times before with the evangelical American church that I had previously served with, and we had driven everyone down in vans. I had been one of the designated drivers. It was cheaper and the drive down always gave the youth the opportunity to connect and bond. When I proposed the idea to the senior pastor, I was asked to explore other options and to consider costs. I did, rather extensively, and came back to the senior pastor with the same conclusion. He saw that I did not understand what he had meant and awkwardly told me, in mixed Korean and English, that what he had meant was to not take the vans. After trying to explain again why driving down was a better option, he even more awkwardly said that he did not want to burden me with the drive down to Jackson because it would be a long drive for a woman. I then understood what he really meant and dropped the matter. We ended up taking the bus. Hong recalls a very similar experience. She writes, "There was the time I was not allowed to drive the church van; I had to find a man to drive the youth group around" (Hong 2015, 60).

My ministry experiences in South Korea, Canada and Singapore, all within the Korean diaspora church community, could be summed up as a series of cultural lessons, pushing the prescribed gender-role boundaries, feeling humiliated, picking my battles, learning to let go and, finally, being wiser in navigating the cultural landscape. These stories, some painful, some downright humiliating, many simply baffling, are all part of what God used to make me

more aware, much more grateful, hopefully wiser, and more confident today. But there were moments when it did feel like a breaking point and the same tears that my mother had cried for me when I told her I wanted to do ministry, I now cried for myself many times over.

But for all the tears and desire to run away from my own skin, second guessing and doubting, the journey thus far caused me to be more in tune with who I had become. Frankly, I was not thankful for the experiences when I was going through them but, in hindsight, I was grateful. They were vital lessons, each one digging just a little deeper than the former, so that I no longer shied away from the proverbial mirror, not trying to be something I clearly was. I grasped and appreciated my authentic self, which is both Korean and Canadian. I became ever more grateful to God who created me intentionally with no apologies, in my ethnicity and gender, according to his will and purpose for my life and today's world. The "cultural baggage" was my lot to embrace and, in some cases, overcome; and in this still on-going journey, it was an important part of my *being* and *doing*, teaching me how my unique leadership perspective and skill set can serve God's kingdom best.

Biblical Passages On Women In Leadership

Because of my own experiences as a woman in leadership, including the complete absence of Korean women in senior leadership roles when I was growing up, the development of my own perspective on women in the Bible was significant. Unsurprisingly, though unnoticed at the time, my perspective was steeped in the traditional Confucian gender-ideology that undergirded our Korean

diaspora church context. Kyung Sook Lee, in writing about the traditional and widely accepted Korean Christian interpretation of the Book of Ruth, prefaced her chapter stating:

> In my view, patriarchal elements of Korean society have been consolidated by the confluence of the Bible with the Korean ideology of Neo-Confucianism. This is a negative result of so-called Asian biblical interpretation. It would be unfortunate indeed if we only reinforced our patriarchal system when we interpret the Bible. It is a real question how we Asians can read the Bible using our cultural heritage for our empowerment and liberation, not for oppression and exploitation. (Lee 2011, 1)

Ai Ra Kim also explained just how deep-seated Confucian gender-ideology was in the following anecdotal excerpt:

> Kang Jin-Sook, whose major reading is the Bible, is a physician who strongly reacted against the idea of female ministers, "Sister! I was actually so angry and even offended when a female minister was appointed to our church as an associate pastor in charge of the Youth Program. How dare a woman be a minister? I don't trust women ministers. Above all. Where in the Bible does it say that a woman can be a minister? The Apostle Paul said that women should remain silent in the church. The priesthood of women is against the Bible." Though she herself holds a leadership position in the health care profession, she defends patriarchal leadership within the Christian church. (Kim 1996, 149)

When reading this excerpt for the first time, it reminded me of what Yoo wrote about how women were considered "good" leaders when they spoke and acted against their own interests (Yoo 2011, 101). It made me wonder how often I followed suit so that I could be considered a good leader in a patriarchal system.

In their book *Leading Wisdom: Asian and Asian North American Women Leaders,* Su Yon Pak and Jung Ha explained that for better or worse, and whether or not we actively embrace Confucian values, Asian women have been shaped by

these precepts (Pak & Kim 2017, 7). This was true for me and recognizing how these cultural factors influenced and shaped me was simply realizing that which had always been true. And this realization was powerful knowledge in my Christian leadership journey.

Deborah, the Old Testament Judge and Leader

As a child, I wanted to do everything that the boys did and, having had an older brother and very supportive parents, I felt that I could. However, in the Korean community, I had been communally and culturally conditioned to behave in certain ways, even the intonation of my voice when speaking in Korean, and in my young adult years there was a deep struggle and confusion as to why I felt so frustrated and stifled in these environments. I was not able to identify the pressure point.

When I came across the story of the female judge Deborah, her courage in stark contrast the male military leader Barak, I was captivated (Judges 4). She did not go out into battle but she was clearly the superior leader. Moreover, even before the battle against Sisera, she was the acknowledged judge amongst her people and held court. Jo Ann Davidson unpacked the normalcy of Deborah's leadership further:

> Deborah appears in the book of Judges without any apology, explanation, or suggestion that it was irregular for a woman to fill such a position…In Deborah's time, legal duties, military leadership, and prophecy were three recognized areas of authority. The book of Judges portrays her as serving in all three of these roles, for she decides disputes, summons people to war, and is a prophet. This great "mother in Israel" (Judg. 5:7) who chants a triumphant hymn of praise is also a wife and musician (Judg. 4:4; 5:1-

> 30)...Nothing in the biblical text ever suggests that it was a shocking thing for God to do nor is their service ever criticized as opposed to the divine will for women. It is never even hinted as extraordinary that women were chosen by God to communicate His will and to lead in its execution. These women were clearly accepted by the covenant community in their roles and blessed by God in their positions. (Davidson 2014, 5545 of 12226)

This one biblical narrative was the exception to the cultural norm and from my experience in my Korean church context; and it planted the seed of "maybe I can" and it sparked my imagination. But, truly, cultural traditions are extremely deep-seated and shape our worldview and behaviour so much so that anything other can feel unnatural, wrong, and even immoral. Ironically, it was an older Korean senior pastor, whom I had unfairly assumed to be against women in leadership, who encouraged me to get ordained. I remember this conversation in his office very well and it was, without doubt, a turning point in my spiritual journey. He not only encouraged me to seek ordination but also backed it up with his considerable influence in the Korean Church when my eligibility—age (25 at the time, which is considered very young), gender (female) and marital status (single)—was brought into question. I fully understand that having an older, male, Korean Senior Pastor who is unafraid and unashamed to fully support a young and untested female's bid for ordination is not the norm. Still, it took several years to feel theologically and culturally comfortable with my ordination, but I remember him as my Eli—the prophetic voice in my leadership journey that encouraged me to listen to God's voice. Christian leadership needs more leaders like him.

Paul on Women in Leadership: 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15

I also took the teaching on 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 literally because everything that I had experienced in the Korean church reinforced a literal, complementarian reading. Women never preached from the pulpit, they never presided over the Communion, and only later did I occasionally see a woman reading the Sunday Scripture and collecting offering. What was obvious was that the women were always polite, always smiling and laughing (but not too loudly), always in the kitchen, always around children, always waiting for their husbands to finish the important meetings as the children played basketball in the gym after Korean language class. Furthermore, as a youth, I also had no tools to exegete and understand these passages other than what I read and grammatically, it seemed clear in what Paul was saying. It was not until seminary when I was taught that, "Christ is King, and context is Queen".

In her article, "New Testament Views of Women: 1 Corinthians 14:34-36", Vicki Priest explored both the unlikely and the probable understandings of this passage. For me, even more important than the positions of these differing perspectives was the realization that there *could* be different ways to understand and interpret these passages. Priest explored several interpretations including that of C.S. Cowles who provided a word study demonstrating that Paul was likely referring to "some women" not all; that the instruction to be silent was volitional; and that the notion of speaking likely had to do with "talk" or "chatter" (Priest 2014). Since my seminary years, I confidently took the position that there were

cultural elements in Paul's instruction and writing that would not apply to the current world context. Moreover, it was inconsistent for Paul to disallow women to teach in Corinth based solely on their gender when in his other writings, he was clearly much more egalitarian in his perspective on women, such as in Galatians 3:28. He was also completely unphased by women leading and teaching in the church. His partnerships with women in his Gospel ministry included women like: Priscilla, mentioned six times in the New Testament and four out of the six times, her name came before her husband's, Aquila; Phoebe, who was called a "deacon" in Romans 16:1 (just as Paul refers to himself and Timothy in Philippians 1:1); and Junia, who was called an Apostle in Romans 16:7. This clearly suggested that an egalitarian reading of Paul's letter to the Corinthians may be closer to his authorial intent than the traditional fundamental view that prohibits all women from teaching men in any circumstance.

With regards to the other Pauline passage in 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Gordon P. Hugenberger offered a persuasive alternative to the traditional reading. He drew from the corpus of the Pauline Epistles and suggested that Paul's use of "man" and "woman" was more consistent with a family dynamic rather than a general ban on women teaching men. He wrote, "Understood this way, Paul's concern is to prohibit only the sort of teaching that would constitute a failure of the requisite wifely 'submission' to her husband…" (Hugenburger, 1992). Thus, according to Hugenberger, one can reasonably understand that this instruction was limited to the domestic sphere. He concluded:

> The point is, rather, that a wife's responsibility to be submissive is precisely limited to familial concerns and as such would not necessarily prohibit her from being the president of a company where her husband is employed or of the country where her husband resides. (Hugenberger 1992, 359)

While Hugenberger did not go as far as to suggest that the wife could also be the senior pastor of the church where her husband attends, to me this particular article opened up the possibility to reconsider how to understand these biblical passages. More significantly, as I learned to embrace my own cultural context and as I began a serious study of the Bible, I also came to understand that the cultural context of the biblical writers was also an enormously relevant and significant factor in proper exegesis. Clearly, a thorough and serious study of the Bible was necessary in Christian leadership and effective authentic leadership must be rooted in a properly exegeted understanding of the full Bible, including an understanding of the historical, cultural, and literary context. Context was queen indeed.

As a final comment on this issue, I took great encouragement from Davidson's observations that, "Cultures may embrace a variety of viewpoints, but from the foundations of Scripture, rightly understood, women are regarded as equals with their male counterparts in God's call to the service of leadership," and "It is apparent that God does not discriminate between male and female in those moments when He calls and blesses leadership" (Davidson 2014, 5346 & 5582). While I was told that God loved me, the surrounding cultural context seemed to impose tiers on this love. Part of my leadership journey included confronting these cultural traditions and it took a while to unlearn what I had thought to be

true. The goal, however, was not to unlearn and forget but rather unlearn and learn properly. This unlearning is part of the authentic leader's personal journey and Barton refers to this as "losing the false self" (Barton 2008, 53).

Authentic Leadership: Intrapersonal Self-Awareness, Interpersonal Relationships, And Real Creativity, Innovation And Personal Development

Authentic Leadership

In Northouse's overview of authentic leadership, he rightly observed that, "People's demand for trustworthy leadership make the study of authentic leadership timely and worthwhile" (Northouse 2019, 197). I went one step further and suggested that authentic leadership, which may be coupled with other leadership theories and styles, must be one of the principal pillars in order to lead in today's complex world. Personally, I found that both servant leadership and transformational leadership function as complementary leadership styles to authentic leadership, and are also relevant in today's culture. Nelson and Dickens further supported the importance of being connected to our inner person:

> Who we are and who we see ourselves to be are crucial to leadership. We bring ourselves, our coping skills, relational ability, approach to faith, values and even our sense of worth to leadership roles. (Nelson & Dickens 2015, 118)

In other words, a leader who neither reflected deeply on how God created her nor thoughtfully considered the context, cultural and otherwise, into which she was born inevitably failed to fully process, appreciate and leverage all the experiences that formed her as a leader. Therefore, as leaders, without an honest reflection of who we are and who we see ourselves to be, we are also unable to fully access the

well of qualities and latent gifts that God has deposited into us from the very beginning; and the mining process is just as significant as the treasure beneath.

Intrapersonal Self-Awareness

Hence, the *intrapersonal* aspect of authentic leadership was fundamental to strong and effective leadership. While, "intrapersonal" literally means "within oneself", authentic self-awareness cannot emerge apart from a knowledge of God, who created us, and being in his presence. Therefore, for the Christian leader, *intrapersonal self-awareness* means being solidly rooted in her relationship with God. There is no substitute. In addition to Jesus Christ, there are several examples of biblical leaders whose leadership was solidly rooted in their relationship with God. Such leaders include individuals like Moses, with whom God spoke as one would to a friend (Exodus 33:7-11); David, who despite his many transgressions, was still called "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22); and Elijah, who after falling into a deep depression after his victory on Mount Carmel, experienced the gentle whisper of God on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:12-13). In all these cases, these leaders were in the presence of God and this was where they confronted their flawed humanity and received God's divine grace. All truly authentic Christian leaders must experience this deep dive into the divine so that they can embrace their own human existence and allow for God's gracious will to work in and through the earthen vessels that are our corporeal bodies and human existence (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Jesus Christ also knew exactly who he was and because of this, his mission was clear. In all the Gospels, Jesus' baptism is recounted along with the voice of God declaring and affirming his Sonship (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). Moreover, he is able to overcome his trial and temptation in the desert because of his certainty in God the Father and his mission as the Son. Despite the disbelief of his own family, the continuous plotting of the religious leaders, the lack of understanding of his disciples, and ultimately, the persecution and suffering he endured, Jesus' leadership was rooted in his identity as God Incarnate and the beloved Son of God. He is the Son of God and he knows the purpose for which he came. In fact, it was his absolute confidence as the Son of God that incited the indignation of the Jewish leaders (John 5:18). In John 10:13, he openly declared, "I and the Father are one", and in a later interaction with the Pharisees, he boldly questioned their doubt, asking:

> …Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods"'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father. (John 10:34-38)

Clearly, Jesus' charisma, wisdom, and power were rooted in his understanding and embracing of who he was, and is, as God's Son. And it was this relationship that he taught and encouraged in his disciples in John 15 when he used the metaphor of the vine and the branches. The branches must abide in the vine in order to receive what they need to bear much fruit (John 15). Later on, Jesus prayed on behalf of his disciples and future believers asking God, "…that all of

them [disciples and future believers] may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me" (John 17:21). Authentic Christian leadership, then, is rooted in the individual's relationship with God and their ongoing abiding in him.

It is also important to remember that an authentic relationship with God gives us courage and patience to confront, and then either accept or reject, aspects of our personal and ministry contexts. Nelson and Dickens wrote, "Truthfully, if leadership lacks the courage or the patience to challenge these constructs, then vision and hope for a better future are pipe dream fantasies. It will take nerve to lead into the future" (Nelson & Dickens 2015, 111). By "constructs", they were referring to traditions that exist in a congregational setting, however, for me, it was all about facing my own cultural constructs, which I didn't even know existed. They were like glass walls and ceilings. Confronting the established cultural context and embracing my femininity, ethnicity (Korean), and nationality (Canadian) as a legitimate, full and unique expression of the image of God was liberating and empowering. It took nerve, but it was authentic. It also took me deeper into my relationship with God. Personally, the first challenge of authentic leadership was confronting my own established constructs.

Interpersonal Relationships

Out of our personal relationship with God, we lead and love others. In other words, leading others naturally flows from a deep and steady relationship with God. Barton states, "Our transformation is never for ourselves alone. It is always for the sake of others" (Barton 2008, 74). Thus, when an expert in the Law asked Jesus about the two greatest commandments, he answered:

> 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Thus, leadership, at the core, is about love. Loving God, loving our authentic selves, and authentically loving others. This is the *interpersonal* aspect of authentic leadership (Northouse 2019, 198). In his book, *The Advantage,* Patrick Lencioni wrote about, "Overcoming the 'Wuss' Factor", stating that a large part of leadership is accountability which is in turn, "…a selfless act, one rooted in a word that I don't use lightly in a business book: *love"* (Lencioni 2012, 57). The premise of his entire book was about how organizational health was what makes *the* difference in a successful company (Lencioni 2012, 11). In other words, how you treat people, the environment, and the work culture that a leader creates, matters. The closing chapter of Nelson and Dickens' book was entitled, "It's All About Relationships." (Nelson & Dickens 2015, 150) Simply put, how leaders treat others, their peers, friends, colleagues, followers, and even strangers, matters. An effective authentic Christian leader loves and cares for others

authentically. Jesus demonstrated this in his interactions with both the woman caught in adultery (John 8) and the Samaritan woman he encountered, purposefully, at the well (John 4). When Mary was caught learning at his feet with the rest of the men instead of helping Martha with the work in the kitchen, Martha—not Mary!—was gently chided for not recognizing that which was better (Luke 10). Jesus was wise, compassionate, and patient in his interactions with others, noticing even the bleeding woman who touched his cloak in the middle of the crowd (Matthew 9). He allowed the children, who the disciples were trying to keep away, to come to him (Matthew 19) and he carefully and compassionately heals the deaf and mute man (Mark 7), touching him gently since this was how the deaf are reassured in a world where there is no sound. Jesus understood those he came to heal and save. Christian leaders, in our humanity, need to strive to understand those we are leading through meaningful and real connections; in other words, authentic relationships.

In Lencioni's book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team,* using a fictionalized case study, he unpacked how authentic and caring relationships in the professional secular context, might look (Lencioni 2002, 188-189). In his narrative, the unexpected CEO, Kathryn, navigates organizational challenges by striving to understand the people she works with, their strengths and weaknesses, and creating an environment where the team can really connect with each other and enjoy the work they are doing. There are some tough conversations and past

organizational baggage that need to be dealt with but her persistence in being true to herself and her compassionate transparency with others ultimately leads her to success (Lencioni 2002). Nelson and Dickens further affirmed the importance of connecting with others, writing, "When personal connections are not made through trust, reliability, care, and appreciation, there is little opportunity for the community to move to a higher level of effectiveness and deeper lives of care" (Nelson & Dickens 2015, 120). In other words, when people are appreciated as necessary full members of the Body of Christ (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12), they are more likely to actively contribute the skills and gifts that they possess to the greater vision and mission. People who feel valued and loved bring their whole selves to the effort, not just what is expected because of cultural or professional expectations. When leaders demonstrate personal care, authenticity and sincerity, they create an environment of personal dedication and complete buy-in from all those involved. Lencioni identified five dysfunctions that undermine effective teamwork beginning with the absence of trust (Lencioni 2002, 188). If there is an absence of trust, it leads to a fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and ultimately, inattention to results (Lencioni 2002, 189). Conversely, when a team trusts one another, they engage in unfiltered and honest conflict around ideas, the commit to decisions and plans of

action, they hold each other accountable, and they focus on attaining results (Lencioni 2002, 189-190). Thus, the level of trust in an organization and/or community is evidence of leadership that recognizes how to create an optimal environment that maximizes teamwork.

Furthermore, Nelson and Dickens wrote, "People follow leaders they trust, and servant leaders nurture that trust so they can set the pace for the organization for needed change and the fulfillment of its mission" (Nelson & Dickens 2015, 44). In his book, *Team of Teams,* retired General of the U.S. Army Stanley McChrystal also wrote about how the leaders of Mission Control concluded that, "…building trust and communication between crew members was more important than further honing specific technical skills" (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell 2015, 108). Moreover, he added that, "The role of the senior leader was no longer that of controlling puppet master, but rather that of an empathetic crafter of culture" (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell 2015, 222). An "empathetic crafter of culture" is someone who is authentically connected to the people around them and genuinely interested in creating an environment where their team will excel.

Reflecting on his own leadership journey, General McChrystal writes, "The temptation to lead as a chess master, controlling each move of the organization, must give way to an approach as a gardener, enabling rather than directing. A gardening approach to leadership is anything but passive" (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman & Fussell 2015, 232). By its very nature, a garden is organic, a place where the gardener creates space and cultivates an environment where the plants can grow. The gardener also has an intimate knowledge of both the soil and the condition of the plants, a relationship if you will, so that she can ensure that they are healthy and thriving. Authentic leadership does the same. There is a sincere genuine relationship between the leader and the group. This does not mean that the leader must hang out with everyone on the weekend and know everyone's favourite movie and childhood trauma. What it does mean is that the authentic leader establishes meaningful touchpoints with her team and understands the interpersonal dynamics so that she can draw out their best in all circumstances. Nelson and Dickens call this leading "from all sides." (Nelson & Dickens 2015, 45) Such a leader knows when to lead from the front, when to come alongside their team, and when to push from behind. She is an attentive leader and cultivates an environment that leaves room for individuals to grow and flourish. She does not stand in the way or lord over

others who show potential to grow taller and bear more fruit. Jesus was very intentional in his metaphors, and his declaration that he is the vine and we are branches brims with life (John 15). These are the kind of life-giving interpersonal dynamics that authentic leaders create.

A New Testament example that demonstrates authentic leadership in interpersonal dynamics is Paul's letter to Philemon (Philemon). By penning the letter in his own name, Paul cultivated a constructive connection in a potentially destructive and possibly fatal confrontation between Onesimus, a runaway slave, and Philemon, his master. When he encouraged Onesimus to return to his master Philemon, he was effectively asking him to put his life into his master's hands. Conversely, Paul exhorted Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother in Christ. Paul was essentially asking both men to be vulnerable so that real reconciliation can take place. This, according to Lencioni is "vulnerability-based trust" (Lencioni 2012, 27); and Paul was able to make this request because he had earned the trust of both men through his leadership and his own intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal transparency. He encouraged them to be in a trust-based relationship so that there would be no fear of conflict, they could be committed to each other as brothers (and sisters) in Christ and accountable to each other as believers, for the Lord's purpose. Moreover, Paul demonstrated his trust

in Philemon by not commanding him but rather by asking him for a favour and trusting him to make the right decision.

Even the Son of God came to serve and ultimately die for sinners (Mark 10:45). Jesus was a disruptive leader and a crafter of new Kingdom culture. He not only demonstrated this in his ministry, for example when he healed on Sabbath, but also taught outright:

> You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

In his leadership, Jesus exemplified real sacrifice and sincere service, teaching and demonstrating that true religion, including fasting, praying, tithing, and serving, were rooted in a relationship with God.

Real Creativity, Innovation and Personal Development

There is also an unpredictable and creative aspect to authentic leadership. This can mean a couple things. In the first place, unpredictable and innovative can refer to the development of the individual, literally, personal development. While growth is expected, *how* the leader grows can be unpredictable and the *purpose* God has for her can be innovative. For example, throughout my leadership

journey, I could not have predicted, and didn't desire, the many unexpected challenges and moments of growth that I encountered. I also could not have predicted where God would have me serving and did not imagine that this was God's purpose. So often, I have been reminded of Isaiah 55:8-9: his thoughts are indeed not my thoughts, and his ways are not my way.

According to Northouse, this means that authentic leadership "can be nurtured in a leader" (Northouse 2019, 198). Furthermore, "Authentic leadership develops in people over a lifetime and can be triggered by major life events, such as a severe illness or a new career" (Northouse, 2019, 198). Thus, authenticity and becoming an authentic leader is part of the individual's life journey. This personal journey is integral to a leader's growth and development, both *intra-personally* and *inter-personally*. Authentic leadership acknowledges and encourages personal growth, always leaving room for improvement. In other words, there is a re-creation of the individual as she grows throughout her personal leadership journey.

Second, personal development can also apply to the team as a whole, applying to the team as one unit as, "Strategies and change emerge through transparent and honest relationships" (Nelson & Dicken 2015, 121). In other

words, authenticity in our interpersonal relationships can create innovative momentum and cultural change as ideas are exchanged in an environment of transparent mutual learning and decisions are made out of "vulnerability-based trust" (Lencioni, 2021, 27). Authentic leaders are confident in their personal calling and create environments where others can also grow and engage in their own leadership journeys. This transparent and mutually edifying dynamic is the uniquely balanced environment that allows for people to exchange ideas freely, without fear of hidden agenda or consequence, pushing each other to perform at the highest level, thereby changing the culture around them, together. In this sense, "Leaders and followers are tied together in productive ways that go beyond the stereotypical leader-follower relationship. This results in strong leader-member relationships, greater understanding and higher productivity." (Northouse 2019, 201)

For example, when women leaders are embraced and included by senior leaders in decision-making conversations, they bring a different perspective to the usual questions that allows for more creative and effective solutions. In my own experience, many well-intentioned male leaders who advocate for women in leadership, look for women leaders to champion these senior leadership roles. However, by their own admission, they weren't certain where to look because the

general trend was that women in conversative Christian circles tended to choose to pause their careers to raise their family. It was a group of female leaders who pointed out that there were no clear pathways for women to attain senior leadership positions because the entire system of advancement was catered to men. Thus, the question should no longer be, "Where are the women leaders?" but rather, "How can we create pathways for women leaders to excel?" From this, strategies that we had never before thought about emerged because we asked the right question. In other words, a proper perspective can help ask the right questions which can lead to creative solutions. This happens when real and authentic relationships are formed as the basis of collaboration.

Leading from Your Strengths

Authenticity not only means owning up to your weaknesses but also acknowledging your strengths. In my Korean culture, self-deprecation and down-playing personal achievement is all part of the humble-brag, which is feigned modesty that draws more attention. Subtle nuanced comments and back-handed compliments are also part of the colloquial interaction. For example, questions that start with, "Are you sure…?" or "Don't you think…?" are cues to be on guard about what might be coming next. These, however, were much easier to overcome than gender-ideology.

What I found personally challenging was that my very being as a female somehow implied inferiority and incurred shame. Comments from male pastors and colleagues like, "You are like a man (in assertiveness, creativity, intelligence)", or compliments like, "You preach better than a man", say much about the cultural assumptions made about women. Hong's personal experience about being "checked" to see if she "would try to reach beyond the boundaries set for [her]" and seek to become a senior pastor was telling (Hong 2015, 59). How could a leader find strength in her leadership when her identity as a woman was itself considered a weakness? One thing is certain—in time, the leadership journey will call the leader to confront, reflect, and overcome whatever cultural constructs that limit and hinder her leadership capacity. In my case, this meant confronting the cultural stereotypes of female leaders, not in anger, but with confidence and discernment.

A tool that I really appreciated was the Clifton StrengthsFinder, which identified my top five themes as: Achiever, Learner, Intellection, Relator, Activator (Clifton 2019). Personally, embracing my strengths over the years was quite the journey because I had conditioned myself to always think that someone else was better and that my best was not quite good enough. Paradoxically, it was failure that taught me to embrace my strengths. It was also life experience, some good and enough bad, that taught me to lead from my strengths. Personal development tools like the Clifton StrengthsFinder, MBTI, Enneagram, etc., are valuable resources that can help a leader reflect on her past experiences, providing her with personal insights to which she may have previously been blind.

Furthermore, because of my own experience with self-reflective tools, I am now convinced that everyone has the ability to lead in some capacity. That includes not only me but also the people I lead. In a very real sense, authentic Christian leadership acknowledges this oft-latent ability in oneself and in others, and is therefore, always hopeful and optimistic. In many ways, authentic leadership mirrors the Pauline passage on love. I replaced "love" is with "leadership" and re-read this passage and rather liked how it sounded:

> [Leadership] is patient, [leadership] is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [Leadership] does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

I also learned, at the time begrudgingly, to acknowledge my weaknesses. Tony Yeo, referring to the journeys of biblical leaders such as Moses, David, Elijah and Jonah, wrote, "Moments of failure were merely pivotal signposts en route to the crescendo and crux of their leadership" (Yeo 2015, 59). Failure was not the end of a leader's effectiveness for God (Yeo 2015, 62-65). In fact, there were lessons a leader can only learn in failure that were essential to their formation. An authentic leader owns up to the failures and builds on those hard-earned, hard-fought lessons. She acknowledges her personal sinfulness, while also recognizing the grace of God.

> Our Creator knows that we are weak and prone to failure, thus He graciously provides restoration for the repentant believer. God has a wonderful way of picking up the pieces and making something beautiful out of a broken believer's life. (Yeo 2015, 59)

This was the cry of David in Psalm 51 after being confronted by Nathan for his adulterous affair and murderous deed (2 Samuel 12). A lesser man, a falsely authentic king, would have refused to acknowledge his shameful act. Consider Saul's excuse in 1 Samuel 15 and his subsequent actions after Samuel confronts him with his disobedience. In fact, the life of a Christian leader is marked by the cycle of sin and restoration, always learning, always growing, being sanctified into Christ-likeness day by day. This cycle of repentance and restoration, however, should not discourage us but rather spur us on in the same way that Paul encourages us to run our race well just as he has (2 Timothy 4:7-8), also reminding the Romans, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) Christian leadership, then, also involves the authentic recognition of one's strengths and giftings as well as one's innate weaknesses and flaws.

Necessary Practices For Effective Authentic Leadership

Spiritual Discipline

If we want to grow in our strengths and manage our weaknesses, there needs to be self-discipline in the spiritual disciplines. Paul, even as he encourages the Corinthians, also wrote:

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Therefore, if we are to maintain our relationship with God and others, authentic Christian leaders must practice consistent and regular communion with God through the reading of the Bible and prayer. These two are simply non-negotiable. The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). However, as demonstrated by my own personal account, it is not just about reading the Bible but also having the tools, resources and knowledge for proper exegesis. Without a deeper understanding of the Bible that goes beyond the written words, one can be easily misled to believe in things that the Bible does *not* say.

As the Word incarnate, Jesus was thoroughly versed in the Law and his knowledge of the Word (John 1). When Satan tempts him in the desert, even (mis)using passages in the Scriptures against him, Jesus responds with the proper and true understanding and use of the Scriptures. Later in his ministry, he is also forced to spar with the religious leaders as they challenge his authority and teachings. In one particular case, the Sadducees attempted to trap him with a question and Jesus simply responded, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?" (Mark 12:24)

In addition, prayer, as simple as it may seem, is a vital and "one of the most important and profound forms of theological expression" (Ward 2017, 170). To share just a few biblical examples; Job prayed daily for his children (Job 1), Hannah prayed fervently for a son and bore Samuel (1 Samuel), Daniel's dedicated prayer life got him thrown into the lions' den and God delivered him (Daniel 6), Hezekiah prayed for deliverance from the Assyrians and healing from his illness (Isaiah 37 & 38), Elijah prayed and the LORD answered with fire at Mount Carmel and with rain over the parched land (1 Kings 18)—these are just a few stories that demonstrate the power and essential nature of prayer in the life of the authentic Christian leader.

Moreover, Jesus demonstrates the same discipline of prayer, teaching the disciples to pray (Matthew 6) and withdrawing often to seek time in prayer, most notably in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26). In the Korean Church tradition, early morning prayer is still a common practice on the peninsula and in the first-generation immigrant community. Personal prayer time, carved out intentionally in the midst of busy schedules and ministry needs, is a discipline that needs to be practiced more by all leaders. It is not just about saying things to God but waiting on him and listening to his response and promptings. A.W. Tozer preaches:

> Where God and man are in relationship, this must be the ideal. God must be the communicator, and man must be in the listening, obeying attitude. If men and women are not willing to assume this listening attitude, there will be no meeting with God in living, personal experience… (Tozer 1986)

He further adds, "The spiritual giants of old were those who at some time became acutely conscious of the presence of God. They maintained that consciousness for the rest of their lives…" (Tozer 1986). Like any other discipline, the more one practices both speaking with God, listening to his voice, and simply being in his Presence, the more rewarding and richer the relationship grows.

Meditation, quiet time, personal retreats, journaling, creative writing, music, and fasting are also practices that deepen and strengthen one's relationship with God, and therefore, one's capacity to lead others. Dallas Willard affirms that the spiritual disciplines are key to spirituality. He writes that, "…spiritual growth and vitality stem from what we actually *do* with our lives, from the *habits* we form, and from the *character* that results" (Willard 1998, 20). This statement encapsulates the effective *praxis* of reflection, action, and evaluation. Simply put, these are the tools of praxis the Christian leader needs in order to run their spiritual race, a journey fraught with challenges, with the assurance of our promised victory through Christ Jesus. Ward writes, "The purpose behind these ways of doing practical theology is to enrich and develop a life of faith by taking time to pay attention to what it means to live as a Christian" (Ward 2017, 168).

Those who fail to engage with God sincerely and meaningfully will inevitably fail in completing the race. Such in the tragic case of King Saul—who admittedly started out so well—when Samuel was forced to confront him about his external, showy, and superficial understanding of obedience:

> Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better

> than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king. (1 Samuel 15:22-23)

Yeo rightly observes that, "King Saul's failure in office was due to a failure in his relationship with God" (Yeo 2015, 84). David, on the other hand, learned to trust and wait on God, a relationship that developed over time and through many internal struggles, as evident from his deeply moving and viscerally honest writings in the Book of Psalms. The writer of Hebrews also knows how essential it is to be ever vigilant of sin and continually focused on Christ:

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

One of the traits, then, of a successful authentic leader is her stamina in persevering and running the race until the end. In her deepening relationship with God, she also grows more confident in the knowledge that Christian leadership is as much a journey of "failing forwards" as it is of triumphs and victories. It is a sober assessment and an honest acknowledgement of our need to be wary of the prowling lion (1 Peter 5:8) as we walk circumspectly, not as the foolish but as the wise (Ephesians 5:15-18), and the need to be spiritually disciplined as we lead. In the words of the Psalmist, "Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name" (Psalm 86:11). The LORD teaches those who are willing to learn. C.S. Lewis writes:

> When you come to knowing God, the initiative lies on His side. If He does not show Himself, nothing you can do will enable you to find Him. And, in fact, He shows much more of Himself to some people than to others—

> not because He has favourites, but because it is impossible for Him to show Himself to a man whose whole mind and character are in the wrong condition. Just as sunlight, though it has no favourites, cannot be reflected in a dusty mirror as clearly as in a clean one. (Lewis 1952, 164)

Self-Differentiation

Self-differentiation is also another essential practice of authentic leadership. According to the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, an individual:

> …with a well-differentiated 'self' recognizes his[/her] realistic dependence on others, but he[/she] can stay calm and clear headed enough in the face of conflict, criticism, and rejection to distinguish thinking rooting in a careful assessment of the facts from thinking clouded by emotionality. (Bowen Center for the Study of Family 2021)

It is important for a leader to recognize that she is part of group and/or team but not be given to any emotional pressure that influences her leadership and decision making. Therefore, in situations of high emotional investment or strong cultural assumptions, while the leader must be aware of these factors, she must remain well-differentiated so that she is not responding emotionally to people's opinions or circumstances.

For example, when Jesus shared with his disciples about his impending suffering and death, Peter rebuked him saying, "Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22) We know that Peter's words were rooted in his love for Jesus but, ultimately, *he* did not want Jesus to die. Jesus returned the rebuke saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (Matthew

16:23). Jesus knew who he was and the reason why he came to this earth. The emotional relationship with his family, the feelings of his disciples, his own comfort, the politics of the day—all of these things do not sway his resolve.

We see the same resolute character in David as he stood before Saul who reminded him of all the reasons why he could not win against Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Yet David knew what he was capable of and that the LORD was with him just as He was with him when he fought the lion and the bear. With this experience behind him, David boldly went to fight the giant and he won. David knew the LORD was with him even if no one else did. Similarly, despite the surrounding culture and the pressure from others, Daniel and his friends "purposed in their hearts" not to eat food from the King's table that would cause them to disobey God and they were steadfast in their resolve (Daniel 1); Daniel's friends were also able to self-differentiate when they were threatened with being burned alive in the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue (Daniel 3). They were fully aware of the consequences, but they were also completely devoted to the LORD and were willing to accept the prescribed judgment. Later on, Daniel also refused to give in to the threats and scheming of jealous colleagues and was thrown into the lions' den for his uncompromising prayer life (Daniel 6). Esther also demonstrated this strength as she determined to go before the king unsummoned (Esther 4). They were all strong, self-differentiated biblical leaders who were able to discern God's will for them as individuals because of their prayer life and their relationship with him. Despite what the other people around them were doing and the pressures they faced, they

knew who they were and they were certain of their non-negotiables before they faced their challenges and were differentiated enough not to let the opinions of others and the circumstances shake their resolve. They withstood these pressures in obedience to God, because of their strong relationships with him. In other words, healthy self-differentiation is the result of an authentic relationship with God.

When a leader is not self-differentiated, circumstances and external influences, which include other people's opinions and cultural expectations, can cause confusion leading to second-guessing and doubting. For Hong, as she considered her calling and faced the cultural challenges of the Korean American Church, she questioned herself wondering:

> Was a pastor's first call always like this—humiliating, belittling, frightening? Did this response come because I was a woman and did not fit into the preconceived mold of Korean American femininity? Did my male counterparts go through this? Maybe it was normal. (Hong 2015, 62)

Frankly, so did I. As previously mentioned, I immediately assumed that God had called me to academic ministry because, surely, it was not to ordained ministry. When I pursued pastoral leadership, I was taken aback by some of the questions I was asked in my own interviews and was made to feel that it was somehow my fault that they were asking these questions. Like Hong, I also wondered whether it was all normal and, at the time, I was not sure. Hong further shares moments of pain and shame when well-meaning women would comment on her appearance, telling her that she should cut her hair, wear less makeup or dress more modestly. And they said all of this to her because they thought of her like a daughter (Hong

2015, 60). Again, like Hong, I know that feeling of shame and anger; the assumptions, the demands, the venomously kind words that sink in deeper and affect you more than you like to admit. At first, I just smiled and nodded as the frustration and resentment built up, but I felt like a hypocrite because, behind the smile, I was hurt, confused and angry.

There is a great advantage in self-differentiating because one "is not willing to merely escape the emotional tension; rather, he or she has the stamina and staying power to remain in that place of creative tension until a third way opens up that somehow honors both realities" (Barton 2008, 27). I believe this to be true for all who feel "stuck" between two cultures. In my leadership journey, I learned over many years, how to differentiate God's personal calling in my life from the cultural expectations and what others thought were appropriate for women in the church. Now, I am much more aware how my cultural context shaped my perspective on women in the church and I feel much more comfortable and able to navigate the cultural landscape. I have even learned how to use my femininity as an unexpected and underestimated strength in the more traditional Korean cultural context.

In self-differentiating, I also embrace every part of how God created me. Knowing that God created me as a Korean Canadian female and embracing it wholly as part of His calling is authentically liberating. Again, despite her own difficult experience, Bae confesses, "The Korean immigrant church is my second home." (Bae 2015, 80) Likewise, the Korean diaspora church is also my second

home. I am as He created me, and I serve as He calls. And it feels good to be fully myself, self-differentiated, more aware, and affirmed in my calling to serve.

Authentic Praxis

An authentic Christian leader has an established and thoughtful praxis. Anderson writes:

> As a theological discipline its [practical theology] primary purpose is to ensure that the church's public proclamations and praxis in the world faithfully reflect the nature and purpose of God's continuing mission to the world and in so doing authentically addresses the contemporary context into which the church seeks to minister. (Anderson 2009, 22)

When applied to the individual Christian leader, practical theology ensures that the leader reflects the nature and purpose of God's calling in her life in how she leads the organization and/or community where she is serving. Anderson further adds that, "In praxis one is not only guided in one's actions by the intention of realizing the telos, or purpose, but by discovering and grasping this telos through the action itself" (Anderson 2009, 49). Hence, there is overlap in how a well-differentiated leader will be able to discern purpose through her intentional decisions and actions, unaffected by the emotional influence or baggage of those around her. Additionally, the praxis of the Christian leader is an overflow of her leadership journey, her relationship with God, and her genuine compassion for others. Not having a praxis would be like claiming to have faith but without works (James 2:17); one necessarily results in the other.

In his book, *The Shape of Practical Theology,* Anderson proposes two important questions in his Christopraxis; first, "How then should I live?" and,

second, "What then should I do?" (Anderson 2009, 52). While Anderson defines Christopraxis as "the continuation of Christ's own ministry of revelation and reconciliation", I have borrowed his two questions for my understanding of authentic praxis (Anderson 2009, 54). I will also add a preceding question which I believe is essential for authentic leadership and effective praxis, which is, "Who am I?" The answer to this question is a core part of an authentic leadership journey and this question resurfaces during different seasons in our lives. The answer can also evolve throughout our leadership journey. For Moses, a significant moment was when he killed the Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, only to be called an Egyptian himself by the very people he wanted to protect (Exodus 2). The question arose again when he encountered God in the burning bush (Exodus 3). For Mary, it was the moment Gabriel appeared to her and again when Jesus was crucified (Luke 1 & 23). For the Apostle Paul, it was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Peter wrestled with this question many times, including when Jesus first called him; however, his most difficult episode came after his denial of Jesus, which by God's grace led to his restoration (Matthew 4; Luke 22; John 21). Jesus also asked this question of Himself to His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" because the answer was absolutely vital (Matthew 16). Admittedly, this incident is a little different as Jesus was not asking the question of who he was to himself but to others. Still, the value of authentic self-knowledge is life-giving. In my own leadership journey, I have found that this question has come up a few times along the way, a reminder that I am still growing as an individual and as a leader with every season of life that passes.

It is an oft quoted phrase from Socrates that declares, "An unexamined life is a life not worth living." (Plato, *Apology* 38a5–6) The implication is that such a life is thoughtless, without intent, and volitional only insofar as instinct. An authentic life and praxis, however, includes regular reflection as we live through our everyday moments and experiences, which leads to a more informed, effective and even transformative, subsequent action. Regarding Christopraxis, Root suggests:

> Anderson has made the richest articulation of the connection between experience and reflection to practice through his Christopraxis approach. He contends that we experience divine action and must reflect on this lived and embodied experience that then leads us out into new practices of ministry, the coming of God's presence to us in the first place to minister to us. (Root 2015, 14)

The first divine action that directly includes the individual can be understood to be the act of being created and embodied. Thus, embracing the full Self and how God created us, is a significantly empowering movement towards fully receiving God's love and divine presence in our lives. The assumption that God created me as a "lesser" female implies that God's full love was withheld, not just from me but to all women from any culture and worldview that perpetuates this thinking. Hence, authentic self-reflection and, ultimately, acceptance of the self ("come as you are") precedes true praxis. It is only when we truly know who we are that we can accept the divine grace needed for self-improvement, which is, in the believer's case, becoming more Christlike. In a very real and eternal sense, we are becoming even more fully ourselves in our journey to Christlikeness through authentic praxis, reflection, and action.

Anderson's two questions, "How then should I live?" and "What then should I do?", guide the Christian leader into authentic praxis (Anderson 2009, 52). As one accepts their true Self, the iterative journey of reflection and action can begin. Regardless of when this starts chronologically, the praxis of reflection allows one to process past events, moving us to act in the present and for the future.

One useful pedagogical tool is the Ignatian Paradigm which consists of five elements: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation (Segura-Guzmán 2010, 133-134). In this process, one is called to intentionally engage and pay attention. Context is not happenstance but where the lesson begins—and an important part of the context is the individual herself. In my case, what did it mean to be a Korean Canadian second-generation female leader in the Korean diaspora church community? Essentially, it was the question, "Who am I?"

The experience, good or bad, was not just a series of random events but rather a learning experience for the "mind, heart and hand" (Segura-Guzmán 2010, 134-135). Reflection is the process by which the individual "owns the learning experience through all of the senses, not only through reason" (Segura-Guzmán 2010, 135). I remember times when I, too often, just "pushed through" difficult moments, reasoning to myself that the cultural dissonance was not too big of a deal. But it *was* a big deal and my inner person knew what my mind was ignoring. I remember a professor once asked me, "Where are you going so fast?" I didn't have an answer, just this sense that I had to keep going despite the fact that

I didn't know where I was headed. In hindsight, slowing down meant reflecting on the experiences that I was eager to "push past" and/or forget.

Action challenges and even inspires the individual to do something with the newfound knowledge they have gained in reflecting upon the experience (Segura-Guzmán 2010, 135). I have found that this step takes much more courage than we can muster, hence, the Spirit of "power, love and self-discipline" is needed to move forward (2 Timothy 1:7). Finally, evaluation is also a type or reflective process. Questions like, "Have I moved forward from where I was before?", "What did I find challenging?", "Why did I find it challenging?", "At what point was I leading from my strength?" helped me evaluate my progress in becoming an effective authentic leader.

My first steps included acknowledging truths like; "I am Korean," "I am also Canadian," "I love my grandparents, but we do not hold the same worldview," and "I will always be my brother's younger sister." Anderson's questions also became, "How should I live as a Korean Canadian female leader within my ministry context and community?", followed by, "What then should I do in my role and in my circle of influence?" The former was answered in my daily spiritual disciplines and was, in my perspective, an intensely private intrapersonal process that found expression in interpersonal dynamics. Proverbs 4:23 teaches, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Truly, the question of how we should live and how we should lead was a matter of the heart and the inner person. Nelson and Dickens call this "living from the soul of leadership", describing it as, "the place of self-awareness which

nurtures from below the waterline issues of life" (Nelson and Dickens 2015, 118). The individual who pursues authenticity through reflection and increased self-awareness, "provides a place from which quality leadership and transformative adaptive change are possible" (Nelson and Dickens 2015, 118).

The answer to the second question, "What then should I do?", was my ministry context and my relationship with those who, because of their embodied being, were walking a similar path that I walked, specifically younger Asian Canadian/American women who were leaders in their communities. My personal leadership journey inspired me to lead authentically, being honest with myself before God and genuine in my interactions with others. This means that those I connect with deeply are few, but these relationships were rich and meaningful. In my casual acquaintances, there was sincerity—I cannot but be who I am. When I considered my more painful moments, I gathered strength to speak truth from those experiences so that no other young woman, at least in my circle of influence, would have to feel the humiliation, shame, and self-doubt that I had felt. This was not to shelter them but rather to speak into their lives in moments of confusion, cultural pressure, and uncertainty so that they were able to overcome the challenges in their own personal journeys. I am not a believer in the mantra, "I made it on my own, so should you." The reality is that I did not. I may not have had Korean Canadian clergywomen in my life, but I certainly had others who supported, encouraged, and made a way for me to pursue God's calling. I also believe that my experiences were given to me so that I could, first, become a more integrated person, and second, a better leader to serve other emerging young

women leaders. Practical theology is about changed lives and the transformation of individuals and communities (Ward 2017, 167). To this end, my action research portfolio was a product of my own self-reflective discovery and desire to help others along the way.

Conclusion

American educator Parker Palmer writes that "we teach who we are" (Palmer 2007, 1). Elsewhere, he also writes, "If we can learn to read our own responses to our own experience—a text we are writing unconsciously every day we spend on earth—we will receive the guidance we need to live more authentic lives" (Palmer 2000, 6). We also learn about who we are as we discover our authentic self in God's presence as God writes our story with us. By discovering ourselves we are better equipped to lead and guide others on their journeys, reflecting, mirroring, and pointing to God in our leadership walk, who God is, and how God works. This is the crux of authentic Christian leadership. While we can only share one facet of his character, these collective lessons—the ones we learn and the ones we share—provide all of us a richer, deeper and fuller portrait of who God is.

The leadership journey cannot be divorced from who we are. The call to lead is inextricably interwoven with our personal history, cultural context, and present situation (Barton 2008, 76). And on our journey, we learn to let go and flex, we learn about our strengths and weaknesses, we learn to fail forwards, and we are given the strength to lead forwards. In time, and often in hindsight, we

realize that we are stronger, more competent, and more confident. Thus, the effective Christian leader is true to her authentic self, which can only happen in the presence of the God who created her. A truly authentic leader, then, is one who has met God. Christian leadership, at its core, must be rooted in this authentic relationship—no other will suffice. Leadership fortitude and steadfastness, the kind that perseveres throughout the leadership journey, is forged and refined in God's presence. And from these encounters, intrapersonal awareness deepens through praxis and finds expression in our interpersonal relationships with others—those we follow and those we lead. Authentic Christian leaders allow others to be their honest selves, like the gardener who creates an environment where people—the community—can flourish, where creativity abounds, and innovative ideas emerge.

In reflecting on her own leadership journey, Korean American clergywoman Unzu Lee writes:

> A study has shown that "effective women are not superwomen who hold themselves to the highest standards for all of the role-related tasks of being wives and mothers," for example, but rather they, "adopt different internal and external strategies to redefine their roles." This is very true of my own experience of leadership. Although I am quite a principle-oriented person, I have learned that different circumstances require different styles and types of leadership…How do we know what type of leadership is called for which context? I believe that our lived experience is the best teacher of such wisdom and that we can attain it if we pay attention and consciously reflect on our life lessons. (Lee 2017, 123)

Like Lee, my life lessons are the best curriculum I have. There are some lessons that I have mastered and some that I am still working on. Regardless, it is my

hope that as a Korean Canadian second-generation female leader, I can share my leadership journey with others, opening up the curriculum that is my life and sharing those lessons with other young emerging female leaders so that they can also fully embrace their authentic self, becoming more than they can imagine, and leading others to do the same. The next chapter will share about my action research project whose design was inspired by my philosophy of Christian leadership.

CHAPTER 4:

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter of the research portfolio is the deep dive that I didn't expect to take when I began my Doctor of Ministry. I surprised myself at how interested I was in digging further into this part of my leadership journey, which was core to how God created me and who I am. I was also taken aback by how deeply I resonated with the participants' stories and reflections and how blessed I was by their participation in the research study. The conversations moved me deeply, provided me with a new understanding of my experiences, and helped me see my current ministry context in a much more intentional light. In many ways, the study was a moratorium, a poignant pause that allowed me to reflect on my own experiences and gather insight from my peers as I considered what it would look like to move forward. The research project was purposefully designed to be an invitation to engage in an appreciative inquiry process of sharing stories and looking forward together. The research findings showed that the journey we were on together was meaningful and rewarding for all involved.

Research Question and Opportunity

This research study explored the cultural constructs in the Korean diaspora church context and the leadership challenges they presented to 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean women. Or alternately, when posed as a question, 'What are the leadership challenges faced by Korean 1.5 and 2nd generation women due to the cultural constructs in the Korean diaspora church context?'" Therefore, the successful completion of the research study also resulted in the identification of these cultural challenges that the participants faced as they grew up in the Korean diaspora community context.

As a younger, female, Korean Canadian leader who had served in the Korean diaspora church for 15 years, I faced many difficulties and only later realized that they were cultural challenges. It struck me as a serious issue and I concluded that Korean Canadian women, including myself, could benefit by sharing our stories and determining together what those challenges were. The research study culminated in a final group interview where we explored what the future could be and evaluated our time together.

Personally, I had never had the opportunity to really reflect and process my own experiences in the Korean diaspora church and I welcomed the opportunity to do so with a small group of trusted young women leaders. I was eager to share, listen, learn, and reflect with other women who had grown up and experienced ministry in the same context as I had. I was also open to the possibility that my discontentment with the Korean diaspora church was truly only my own experience and an isolated case, and if so, that there would be other

factors to examine. Still, there were some indicators that this would not be the case and I wanted to confirm what I suspected. For example, I knew that several of the women whom I had contacted in the initial stages of probing for participants had left the Korean diaspora church to serve elsewhere because of limited opportunities. I sought them out as potential participants because I felt that they would not only be eager to share their stories and build relationships with each other but also because they were information-rich resources and would likely advocate for change. I had never asked them about their experiences before and now I wanted to be intentional about engaging. I also wanted the women to hear each other's stories so that together we could bring to light what we had never really talked about before.

As the researcher, I was both an insider and an outsider. Because the research study was prompted by my own experiences as a younger Korean Canadian female leader, I was clearly part of the appreciative inquiry process. However, I was also an outsider in the sense that I was observing how the participants shared their stories, the words they used, how they resonated with others' experiences, how they responded on the online forum, and which cultural factors they found the most limiting. Many times during the research study, I felt as if the group was helping me along my journey and, in the final group interview, the participants shared that this was also the case for them. At the end of our time together, all of us became more aware of just how much the Korean diaspora church culture had affected us and we were also much more resolved to do what we could as leaders in our current ministry contexts.

Response: Intended Purpose and Intended Outcomes

This study addressed the research question by selecting nine participants who had grown up in the Korean diaspora church context and are highly capable working professionals in the secular work force and/or serving as lay leaders in their congregational settings. These women were eager to participate and connect with the others in the research group to share their stories, listen to others, build relationships, and explore what changes were possible.

The intended purpose of this study was to, first, create space for the young Korean Canadian women leaders to talk openly and, second, determine what changes, if necessary, could be made for future generations of female leaders in the Korean diaspora church. The women's interviews, the responses to those interviews in the closed online community, and the final group interview revealed common themes that characterized our experiences in the Korean diaspora church and how it made us feel. The most prevalent and ingrained of the cultural pressures on young women in the Korean diaspora church were found to be patriarchy, hierarchy, and collectivism. In the final group interview, the women also shared that they had never thought to talk about the matter with their friends, peers, or circle of leaders and that this was the first opportunity they had to really reflect and process what it was like to grow up as a young female in the Korean diaspora church. A few were hopeful for change, though admittedly they thought it would be slow and difficult, while the majority were more skeptical and cynical.

The intended outcome of this research project was to ascertain how the women experienced and processed their childhood and youth experiences in the Korean diaspora church and the cultural factors that affected them. We also aimed to determine to what extent this research study was helpful in understanding how their experiences shaped them into the women they are today. Finally, the group also discussed what our next steps might be should change be possible in the Korean diaspora church. While we didn't expect that we would be able to make drastic cultural changes, a personal recognition and acknowledgement of how the culture we grew up in shaped our own worldview and, more importantly, how we viewed ourselves and behaved as women leaders, was a notable outcome.

Participant Criteria and Recruitment

The research study focused on young women whose ethnic background was of Korean descent. The context was further limited to young women who were either 1.5 or 2nd generation citizens or Permanent Residents of Canada, having held this status for more than 3 years. This was to ensure that those participating in the action research project had an understanding of both the Korean and Canadian cultures based on their personal experiences in the Korean diaspora church and the larger Canadian society. The scope of the research study also focused on young women who were between 25-40 years of age, those born between January 1st, 1980 and December 31st, 1995. In order to meet these criteria, I was deliberate in selecting the participants who were interested in taking part. Some of the participants included women I had grown up with and others were former students that I had pastored. I intentionally sought out reflective

young women who were serving as leaders in their own context or pursuing leadership opportunities.

Research Ethics: Consent, Access, Risk and Supervision

In order to minimize any potential power-dynamic between researcher and participants, I made it very clear in the initial contact that I was grateful for their consideration as potential participants. I also explained that this would be a participatory action research study meaning that I, as the researcher, was also part of the study and that my own experience as a younger Korean Canadian female leader had both inspired and compelled this research study.

Some of the participants were my former students and I was concerned that they might feel an obligation to participate in the study. Therefore, to mitigate any sort of pressure, I reached out to them first to see how they felt about participating in such a discussion before extending a formal invitation. In addition, all the participants were reminded throughout the process that they could leave the study at any point, for any reason, and without consequence. This was the case with one initial contact who shared that she was interested in taking part but later did not feel like she had the time and respectfully declined.

Because all the participants were of the age of consent and able to provide their informed consent freely and independently, the research project included a thorough and transparent information letter and consent form (See Appendices A & B). The consent form included a confidentiality clause with regards to both the personal details of the interviews and any other information that might possibly result in the disruption of social relationships. Only the researcher had access to

all the catalogued and stored files; upon request, an individual participant would be able to access only their file. The participants were also informed of the subsequent steps and phases of the interview process, the purpose of the research project, and how the data would be used. Because of the potentially controversial nature of the research, all the participants were given the option of having both their names and information kept anonymous unless otherwise expressly stated by the participant herself and, even then, only in the highly unlikely circumstance where it was absolutely necessary to reveal the participant's identity. There was no financial connection with the participants, and my relationship with the women was based on sincere friendship which was intentional on my part in the project design.

The interviews were conducted via online video chat which allowed for private conversation so that the participant would not be under any duress or pressure. I also began each interview with some casual conversation, taking the time to catch up and put the participant at ease. We also reviewed the information letter and consent form together as a reminder to the participant that she was free to stop the interview at any point and for whatever reason. The women were also informed that they would have access to the final research outcomes as a part of the online community. Moreover, the conversations and interviews were conducted in a casual, non-threatening, narrative fashion that invited the participants to share their honest experiences without prejudice or fear of judgement. During the interview and, as the conversation progressed, I was open to sharing my own experiences with the participants so as to encourage them but

was also careful neither to lead the conversation nor compel them to share any information that they did not want to. Personally, I found that the interviews were mutually encouraging, enlightening and honest.

According to the TCPS2 definition, the research posed minimal risk as the participants were not engaging in any activity that increased the probability or magnitude of possible harm by their implied participation in the research project. Their participation in the research project required only their time on online forums, which was not a large deviation from their everyday activities and could be done in the privacy and safety of their own homes and/or preferred locations. I also accommodated their schedules as much as possible so that they could choose a time that was most convenient for them.

Though this research project was low risk, there were possible stressors to consider. First, there was the possibility of inducing feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, anger, stress, discouragement, or other unpleasant emotions. The nature of this research project asked the participants to recall, reflect and share about some past experiences that may have been challenging, embarrassing, hurtful, and humiliating, for the purposes of identifying the cultural challenges that young women faced in the Korean church and processing as a group how we might move towards possible resolutions. This discomfort was a necessary part of the research project since we were creating space to talk openly about these issues. We mitigated this situation by actively cultivating a safe environment where sharing was mutual and encouraged, not forced or coerced. Participants were not pressed to share beyond their comfort and

I was also mindful to select participants who had matured in their own spiritual and leadership journey so that they had the emotional and spiritual capacity to discuss these sensitive issues with introspection and thoughtfulness.

Second, there was also the possibility of interpersonal conflict. In the course of honest conversations about sensitive cultural issues and personal experiences, there was the possibility of the participants having differing opinions, worldviews, and perspectives which may have caused defensive reactions. This was not the case, however, and the group appreciated the honesty, transparency, authenticity, and openness that everyone demonstrated as they shared about their own experiences.

Third, the nature of the research study involved the sharing of potentially intimate and sensitive personal experiences. The participants were all informed that the research project would ask them to talk openly about their personal experiences as young women in the Korean church community. I was open with the participants about the nature of the study and made it clear that while participants must feel confident that they could contribute meaningfully to the research project, they would not be forced to share beyond their comfort.

The supervising professors for this research project were Dr. Michael Krause and Dr. Mark Chapman. The Tyndale Research Ethics Board approved the study on May 31st, 2021 and the first interview was conducted on June 26th, 2021. Participants were advised that any ethical concerns about the study could be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board.

Research Context

Despite the fact that the Bible was full of female leaders, women's leadership in ecclesiology remained a contentious issue. However, in both the Old and New Testaments, we knew that women played a prominent role in leadership despite the even more patriarchal societies and cultures of the ancient world. Women like Sarah, Rebekah, Rahab, Deborah, Jael, Abigail and Bathsheba exercised considerable influence and leadership in their households; furthermore, in first century Judea, beginning with Elizabeth and Mary, though the societal norms and cultural biases of their day refused to acknowledge them, God did. Jesus was not ashamed to have women follow him as disciples; he did not think twice about approaching women in public. He encouraged Mary to sit and learn along with the Twelve, he commended the faith of two women who dared approach him defying cultural norms (Matthew 15 & Mark 5), and women first shared the news of his Resurrection. Paul also had no qualms about working alongside women, acknowledging them as leaders. These female leaders included Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche, Phoebe, Prisca, and Junia (Acts 16, Philippians 4, Romans 16). Thus, there was much biblical support for women in leadership positions. This discussion has been described in more detail in chapter 3.

However, I encountered a tension when interpreting the message of Scripture as a text written at a particular time and within a particular culture. For me, a large part of that tension was balancing the authority of Scripture with its cultural context. What made my struggle so much more difficult was the fact that my past experiences in the Korean diaspora church and my present culture,

everything of how I was raised and who I was, reflected and reinforced the cultural values of the biblical world.

Roy E. Gane, who contributed to Skip Bell's *Servants and Friends: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*, wrote that God could have overturned the cultural norms of the day, "But He generally chose to work within the constraints of the existing patriarchal society" (Gane 2014, 78). He further wrote, "Patriarchal culture itself was not a timeless principle that is normative for modern Christians. As we study the Pentateuch, we can only uncover God's enduring principles when we understand they are encapsulated in the imperfect cultural garb of a particular time and place" (Gane 2014, 78). The implication was that the cultural norms of the Pentateuch and the resulting cultural view of women did not reflect God's intention for his daughters; rather, it was a product of its time. However, when the current cultural norms and expectations of women in the Korean diaspora church followed a traditional patriarchy in which young girls are raised, this perpetuated the patriarchy and reinforced it with spiritual authority. This was the crux of the issue I observed in the Korean diaspora church. How much of the lack of senior women leaders in the Korean diaspora church was a result of culture? And how could one change this paradigm when a traditional complementarian reading of Scripture reinforced it?

As a younger, female, Korean Canadian leader who had not only grown up in the Korean diaspora church but also served in this ministry context for 15 years, I lived through the cultural expectations of women leaders and the limited, stereotypical opportunities that were made available to us. In my personal

leadership journey, I found that there were few advocates and limited avenues for women leaders. Moreover, there simply were no pathways that I could discern for women to enter into positions of senior leadership. Observation showed that women leaders were not fully represented in the Korean diaspora church and I wanted to explore what young women thought and how they felt about their experiences. I wanted to create an intentional and safe space for the young women to share honestly about their own personal journeys in the Korean diaspora church and how they felt they were shaped by the culture.

Our research group consisted of women to whom I had deliberately reached out because they demonstrated leadership capacity and had grown up in the Korean diaspora church. As a result, they could speak directly from their own experiences and offer insight, encouragement, and community that was rooted in their own struggles and challenges. They were professing believers who had a desire to grow as leaders in their current sphere of influence as lay leaders in their faith community or in their professions, which included homemaking, pastoral ministry, marketing, civil service, education, healthcare, law, non-profit, and a doctoral candidate in psychology. Our ages ranged between 25 and 40 and covered a demographic of current and emerging leaders. The group was limited to 9 participants so we could keep it a smaller sharing community. Spiritually, we set the tone through honest sharing, prayerful reflection, and mutual edification, acknowledging that God was in our lives throughout all our difficulties and even during our time together. This was an important part of understanding our leadership journeys in light of God's faithfulness and love for us as His daughters.

Models and Resources

In a struggle that I had thought no one else felt because no one ever talked about it, I found encouragement and validation in the following texts that shared the stories of Korean women from previous generations who faced this very same challenge. Hyaewol Choi's *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways* (Choi 2009) and Ai Ra Kim's *Women Struggling for a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage from Korea to America* (Kim 1996) revealed the historical narrative behind the imported cultural worldviews of the immigrant first-generation women thereby providing context for the resulting challenges and tensions. These were our grandmothers and mothers who raised us, and, ironically, taught us about our "proper" roles even as they struggled against it. One of the most inspiring books I read was Grace Ji-Sun Kim's collection of stories that recounted the struggles of our Korean American sisters who faced obstacles as women in leadership. They were sad stories, some humourous and some frustrating, but altogether familiar, ultimately encouraging and inspiring. Finally, another rich resource was Su Yon Pak and Jung Ha Kim's anthology of essays in *Leading Wisdom: Asian and Asian North American Women Leaders,* which offered insightful personal commentary and theological reflections based on personal anecdotes about the leadership challenges of Asian North American women (Pak and Kim 2017).

Several courses were also instrumental in helping me frame and understand my personal leadership journey. DMML 0901 "The Formation of the Leader," was the first opportunity for me to take a serious reflective break from

ministry and really examine who I had become through my past experiences and the decisions that I had made. It was a deeply introspective time for me to look back on my leadership journey and trace the hand of God in all the challenges and triumphs and to acknowledge that all my experiences, even my free will choices, were part of His uniquely tailored path for me. As I looked forward, it gave me strength and hope to move forward despite the feeling that things had stalled. In this course, both the MBTI and the Clifton StrengthsFinder were extremely helpful in affirming my leadership qualities—traits that I had felt that I had but never had articulated and certainly not formalized in an assessment. The cohort feedback and support were also integral to the re-building of my self-confidence and this was a first milestone in re-discovering perseverance and re-engaging my leadership journey with intention and anticipation.

Another personally enlightening and eye-opening course was DMML 0941 "Exegeting Your Ministry Context." I had gone through life and served in my ministry context with an intuitive knowledge but never with an intentional parsing of why the context was structured and functioned the way it did. This proved to be an opportunity for me to carefully examine the ministry context where I had served for so long and also consider how it had shaped me. I had never actually considered myself as an Asian female leader and had always just thought of myself as just another leader in the room, but it was during this course that I realized that being a younger, Asian, female was part of who I was as a leader. It was also how everyone else saw me. As I began to do a deeper dive into what this meant for me and my past experiences, I came across some insightful

readings and one of the most influential resources that helped shape my action research project was *Here I Am: Faith Stories of Korean American Clergywomen* by Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Kim 2015). This anthology of anecdotes and articles written by Korean American clergywomen was the first time that I had read stories that felt like my own lived experiences. It was a mixed feeling of selfish relief and frustration—relief because I was not the only one who experienced this and frustration that so many other young women had also lived through such humiliating moments. This particular anthology resonated so deeply that it made me wonder what the women in my own community might have experienced—and not just clergywomen but more specifically, young women, my own friends and peers whom I had grown up with and the current young women who are part of the upcoming generation of leaders.

Finally, DMML 0902 "Theory, Theology, and the Art of Leadership" and DMML 0942 "Philosophy of Christian Leadership" guided our cohort through leadership theory and preferred leadership style, which for me, landed on authentic leadership. This was a significant realization for me because being an authentic leader necessarily entailed embracing my whole self and leading from that inner person. The writing of my philosophy of Christian leadership paper helped me anchor my leadership approach and embrace all of who I am as a Korean Canadian female leader and what that meant for my leadership in both the Korean diaspora church and non-Korean context.

Additional resources that practically equipped me for my research included Sensing's *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects*

for Doctor of Ministry Theses (Sensing 2011), Presnell and Savage's *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Presnell and Savage 2008), and Cooperrider and Whitney's *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005).

Project, Methodology, and Methods

Following the methodology of Narrative Research and Appreciative Inquiry, the interviews were designed so that the participants would be encouraged to recollect and share their experiences as stories, and the intention of the group forum was to come together to consider how we could process our experiences together and envision what steps—small though they may be—could be taken to begin change, first in ourselves, and then, hopefully in our immediate circles of influence. Though change was desired for the Korean diaspora community as well, we focused on these initial goals recognizing that sweeping cultural change was not a likely outcome.

Field

The field for this research project included 9 participants, all of whom were young Korean Canadian women who had extensive church experience in the Korean diaspora church context and who were currently active members in a local church. The participants were all adults between the ages of 25 to 40 years, those born between January 1st, 1980 and December 31st, 1995, who were able to give free, informed and independent consent regarding their participation in this study. In the case of the women who were born in the early 80's, we had grown up

together in the Korean diaspora church community but had gone our separate ways. We never had the chance to talk openly and honestly about our experiences because we were too busy growing up. Now, with some life experience behind us and the prospect of mentoring younger emerging women leaders, this was the opportunity to reconnect, share, and unpack how growing up as young girls in the Korean diaspora church had impacted and shaped us. I saw this as an opportunity to discern how we could better encourage and support our younger counterparts. At the very least, we didn't want to subconsciously perpetuate the cultural norms that had frustrated us.

All the participants also grew up in the Korean diaspora church context and were continuing in their faith in their respective congregations. They all graduated from university and had professional experience that exposed them to different leadership cultures and structures. Three were young mothers with daughters and all served in the Korean diaspora church. Two continued to be part of the Korean diaspora church and one was a pastor at a non-Korean church. Three of the women were participants I met as young adult and the remaining three young women were former students in the ministry where I served as their pastor. I was very interested in hearing their stories and how they experienced the church we attended together. I counted them all as acquaintances, colleagues, and friends. They were all thoughtful young women who were capable of reflection and critical thinking. Because of our previous relationship, they were comfortable sharing their honest experiences and thoughts on this issue that affected us all.

Scope

The research project focused on the leadership journeys of the young women and how the lack of women leaders in Korean churches shaped their view of themselves as potential leaders. Moreover, we also explored how the stereotypical roles of women, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children, influenced their involvement, or lack thereof, in the Korean diaspora church. The interviews and online group forum covered past experiences, present journeys, and future possibilities. The aim was to create a safe space for women leaders to share about their experiences that could lead to establishing preliminary steps for the inclusion of more women leaders in the Korean diaspora church. However, the scope of this research project did not include implementing any new leadership structures or changing existing cultural paradigms.

The geographical scope of this research was also limited to Korean Canadian participants. However, from my experiences serving as a pastor on the staff of churches in the Korean diaspora communities in the United States, South Korea, Canada and Singapore, the imported structure and culture of the Korean diaspora church was assumed to be consistent and I hoped that the findings of this research study could be relevant beyond the Korean Canadian context. For example, I found that the anthology of stories collected from Korean American clergywomen reflected experiences that are both familiar, and similar in cultural reference and leadership struggles, as my own experiences within the Korean diaspora church communities.

While it would be interesting to examine the influence of different denominational affiliations of the women and their Korean Canadian church contexts, this was beyond the scope of the research as the study was limited to focusing on gender challenges regardless of denomination. Preliminary study and research along with personal experience, however, suggest that denominational affiliation is not as strong an influence as imported cultural norms and expectations.

Finally, the research was limited to the female perspective. The male voice and perspective on this leadership issue was important but this study purposefully focused on women's voices and perspectives that were not nuanced by male presence or filtered through male researchers.

Methodology

The methodologies for this research project were participatory action research, narrative research, and appreciative inquiry. Because this research project was born out of my own experiences and desire to take a deep dive into the cultural influences that shaped me as an individual and as a leader, I counted myself as one of the participants of the study. Therefore, as part of the action research project, I prepared myself with semi-structured, open-ended questions and encouraged the participants to share their story with their own words. I was mindful to listen more than talk, being conscious to limit the influence of my own bias and experience as I facilitated the interviews. The classes that focused on my personal leadership journey and spiritual formation had made me aware of how my experiences had shaped me and I was cognizant of how I might hear their

stories, perhaps assuming too much. Therefore, during the interviews, I asked clarifying questions to ensure that I had understood their words the way the participants had meant them. I also asked them to thoughtfully respond to the questions and gave them as much time as they needed to think so that they did not feel rushed. This also gave me time to capture their emotions and comments in their own words.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) was used as an affirmative approach to change that valued the experience and allowed for the researcher to be part of the exploration and discovery process, which was ideal for this research study (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, 7). Despite the challenges of gender roles and expectations that a more traditional culture could impose upon young women leaders, AI offered us the chance to cooperatively engage in a "coevolutionary search for the best in people," including ourselves, the context in which we grew up, and our current space where we are leading and serving (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, 8). In other words, it was helpful that the process was designed for positive change even as we tackled difficult topics that were, in the past, personally hurtful (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, 8). Furthermore, that AI "assumes that every organization and community has many untapped and rich accounts of the positive," aligned with this research project because these young women leaders had much to offer to the Korean diaspora church (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, 8). The final group interview was also designed according to AI principles as we dialogued about the possibilities of change in the Korean

diaspora church for young women leaders to flourish in leadership opportunities (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, 13).

Narrative research was a natural fit with AI because the latter allowed for stories to be explored, as a future narrative of what could be was envisioned by the group together (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, 13). Moreover, narrative research gave us an opportunity to share our stories and critically reflect on how we felt about them and how they shaped us (Savage & Whitney 2008, 88). In our particular research study, it allowed us to share our personal stories for the first time in the way that *we* had experienced it. We didn't have to concern ourselves with how others in the broader cultural context thought we *should* have experienced them. It was an opportunity for us to learn from and consult with each other about our stories and map the effect of our narratives and how they shaped us (Savage & Whitney 2008, 89). Once we were able to acknowledge and embrace our past narratives, it empowered to redesign our present narrative using a different perspective to imagine the emergence of a preferred narrative (Savage & Whitney 2008, 90). In this way, the entire group, including me as the researcher, was part of the action research process, sharing our stories in the interviews and on the online forum. Together, we moved towards a clearer understanding of the cultural factors that had shaped us and our view of women leaders in the Korean diaspora community.

Methods, Phases and Timetable

The methods for my research project incorporated one-on-one interviews, an online group forum throughout the duration of the study, and a final group

interview. The data sources consisted of one-on-one interview transcripts, the written responses to the interviews from the online group forum, the written interactions between the women during the online forum, and the final group interview transcript. Because the women were from different communities, locations, and walks of life with busy schedules, the most strategic space to conduct the research study was to use an online forum where pre-scheduled and pre-recorded interviews could be uploaded for asynchronous viewing and were responded to at the participant's leisure. The final group interview, however, was synchronous and required some scheduling to align the participants' schedules.

For data collection, the one-on-one interviews were recorded and transcribed, the responses to the interviews and the resulting online interactions were captured on the online forum, and the final group interview was also recorded and transcribed. Over the course of 2 months, I met with each participant through an online video chat forum for their one-on-one video recorded interview. Each interview was approximately 35-40 minutes long. Semi-structured and guiding questions served as open-ended prompts to help the participants share their stories from their perspective and in their own words. (Please see Appendix C for the Framing and Guiding Interview Questions for each Interview Cycle.)

The research study was divided into three cycles with a final group interview during which we reflect on the whole experience. The first interview-response cycle focused on our past experiences. The second cycle centered on our current context. The third cycle explored what we could do in the immediate future in our spheres of influence. In the final group interview we regrouped and

reflected on our collective experience over the several weeks of the research study.

Each interview cycle involved three one-on-one interviews that were posted in a closed online forum and were watched and responded to by the rest of the group. All of the participants, including the interviewee, were encouraged to respond so that we could cultivate an atmosphere of honesty and transparency. After each completed cycle, the interviews were analyzed and compared for similarities, emerging themes, and experiences. The data collected from the group forum responses helped to identify clearly emerging themes, in addition to being a forum where the other women could voice their support and encouragement for the women who had shared their experiences. This method of analysis and collecting stories remained consistent for all three cycles of interviews and each round helped frame the conversation for the subsequent interviews.

The first round of interviews focused on past experiences. These young women were born and brought up in the Korean diaspora church context and their understanding and view of women in leadership had undoubtedly been shaped by their church experience, including but not limited to what they saw, what they experienced, what roles their mothers and other women in the church filled, and how they were expected to behave.

The second round of interviews examined where the young women were in their leadership journeys. A few of the participants were no longer actively serving in the Korean diaspora church context but rather in other non-Korean congregations and contexts. It was heart-breaking to hear about the personal

journey that led these young women to leadership positions outside the Korean diaspora church.

The third cycle of interviews explored the potential possibilities for, and the likelihood of seeing, women in meaningful positions of senior leadership within the Korean diaspora church in the near future. This cycle called for honest and critical reflection on the dynamics of their current situation and challenged all of us as young Korean Canadian women to consider making micro-changes that could lead to paradigm shifts for the emerging generation of young women.

The final group interview examined the effectiveness of having an open discussion about their experiences in the Korean diaspora church. This was an opportunity for the women to share their final thoughts about their experience as part of the research study, including what they learned about themselves and thoughts they had about what they would do with what they had learned. (Please refer to Appendix D for an overview of the Interview Stages and Appendix F for the Guidelines for Online Group Forum).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process included several steps and used In Vivo, macro, and inductive coding techniques (Saldana 2015). First, after the interview recordings were completed, they were re-watched and then transcribed. Preliminary notes were made of emerging common and consistent elements in the stories and then compiled in a chart form for comparison. Any unique and outstanding details were noted. The interviews were then posted to the online

group forum so that the other participants could watch, respond, and comment with their thoughts and reflections.

The online group forum was an important part of the data analysis that involved all the participants. The research group was given simple instructions to respond to the interviews according to themes that resonated with them the most. There were no prescribed questions or suggestions so that the women could interact with the parts of the interviews that they connected with the most and respond freely. The online forum comments also helped shape and nuance the next interview cycle and both the second and third interview cycles began with an open-ended question about thoughts or comments that the participant wanted to share or highlights from the preceding online forum discussions. This tied the cycles together to form a continuous journey of interview, group response, and reflection. The goal was to create a free-flowing forum which would help us identify the themes we were gravitating towards. In this way, the research group together identified the emerging themes through group conversation.

In my data analysis, the participants' stories were cross-referenced for common themes. I expected that there would be certain cultural factors and themes that would emerge as we interviewed each participant, and I looked for points of data triangulation and data saturation to confirm consistent and common themes. The group forum discussions, which were responses to the individual interviews, also served to identify these common experiences, themes, and emotions through comments that echoed or affirmed that they had also experienced the same kind of frustrations and hurts. I also found that the group

forum was a safe space where the experiences of the interviewee were affirmed, validated, and encouraged. It was an integral part of the action research journey that helped the group connect, converse, and gel together and it was also important in encouraging an open, transparent, and safe environment. The online forum responses were akin to the hallway or lobby chats in between the more formalized times of sharing and, because the communication was asynchronous, it helped encourage intentional reflection and response.

As I created summary overviews of each interview, I found that our conversations had naturally resulted in the emergence of common patterns, data saturation, and data convergence. The online forum had also helped confirm and clarify how the participants were feeling as it gave them the opportunity to open up and share what resonated with them when watching the interviews and what they felt to be important points as they responded to each other. I found that their responses, reactions, and comments filled in the details of our shared experiences so that it was clear which cultural factors were the most common, formative, and impactful. As part of the research group, I was mindful of my own bias in the data analysis and looked for convergence, but I also recognized that my experience was a valid part of the group's collective journey.

The final step was creating a final data analysis chart with the summary of each interview. This included the most poignant quotations from the participants and the identification of clear themes and cultural factors that were not only mentioned in the interviews, but also confirmed as serious factors and influences by the online group forum responses. How the participants told their story, the

particular words they chose, and how they described the Korean diaspora church were all examined and recorded.

Findings, Interpretations, and Outcomes

The online forum was part of the findings, data analysis, and interpretation. I found the online responses to be thoughtful and revealing as the women shared their responses to each other's stories and comments. The forum also served as a platform to connect and encourage one other in what became our own personal journey. Many of the women commented how another participant's specific experience was just like theirs and how hearing it as someone else's experience caused them to reflect on their own. In response to watching an interview where the participant shared about being told to "tone down" her strong personality and her subsequent lack of confidence in speaking up, one participant responded with the following comment on the online forum:

> This discussion was great in facilitating my own personal reflection. I realize now that I also have a habit of not taking ownership or having confidence in my own ideas and just deferring them to others (which I never used to do but somehow picked up on!). Probably from the growing imposter syndrome but also from hearing feedback over the years that I had to tone down my strong personality, especially in the Korean church.

Thus, through our time together, we were able to find many points of connection and commonality that weaved all our experiences together.

In the third and final round of group interviews, we wondered about next steps and future possibilities. We asked where do young Korean diaspora women leaders go from here? We all had an idea of what we could personally do, which involved both a personal change and little micro-steps in our current spheres of

influence. Though the overall tone was hopeful, we were less optimistic about change in the broader Korean diaspora church. These deeply personal experiences that had challenged our personal calling as leaders proved to be difficult to reconcile as we struggled to find our place in the Korean diaspora church. One participant wrote the following question in her forum response, "Can young women who have a calling to lead even find a place in the diaspora church?"

From the first round of interviews and the responses from the online group forum, clear common themes emerged as the participants considered the cultural challenges they faced as young women leaders in the Korean diaspora church. When asked to recollect what it was like growing up in that community context, the cultural factors of patriarchy and collectivism and the resulting gender roles were integral in shaping how the participants viewed women leaders and felt about themselves.

There was a clear lack of female role models in senior positions of leadership and authority; participants perceived no room or space for women to be leaders or decision-makers. One participant commented that when she was in a leadership role as a young woman in a campus ministry, she went through a "huge identity challenge…because I didn't know what a female leader should look like." Another participant, concerned about her own younger sister in university, who was experiencing self-doubt, including the feeling that she needs to have a male supporter to be heard and taken seriously, asked a question we all had subconsciously considered though never voiced, "Why would we give preference to leaders based on (male) gender?"

During our time together, we realized that no one ever talked about the system and how uncomfortable it made us feel; the church's culture or why women weren't in meaningful, decision-making leadership roles was never questioned. We all just went along with the flow and never thought to imagine that it could be otherwise. It was, "…something that we all didn't really talk about together, we just all kind of suffered alone." Another participant commented:

> I think it was a very normalizing experience because it was so hidden in the church…It was so normal and like it was kind of like a narrative of how women are, how girls are growing up, and we just kind of accepted it from a young age, as if it was like truth.

Similarly, one of the older participants, upon reflecting on her own experience when she was younger, agreed that the way things were done in the Korean diaspora church was not questioned and simply accepted. She also added, "But as I got to an age, where having served for many years and wanting to do more, then it became very evident to me and it was almost like a slap in the face."

We also shared about how many females have the same experience of feeling insecure within the church and not being valued like the boys. Girls, in the group's experience, were seen as "lesser" and did not receive as much support or care from the pastors. The pastors focused more on the boys, taking more of their time to mentor them rather than the girls. One online response resonated with how the interviewee felt like the church was like a "boy's club," especially when there was a male pastor, which was usually the case. Another participant distinctly remembered the tone of voice a pastor had used with her, making her feel, "…that I had no idea what was happening," and an older female participant offered this comment:

> Young females, and those who desire to serve in particular, are seeing the patriarchic and archaic system in place and are being deterred. Especially when we are working professionals who are not only taking on bigger roles but also have female peers [in the field].

Now, having had the opportunity to share, reflect, and think about our experiences through this research study, the following cultural values emerged as the most difficult challenges that our group of young women leaders faced in the Korean diaspora church.

Patriarchy, Gender Roles, & Expectations of Women

According to the interviews and forum comments, women's roles in the Korean diaspora church have been culturally defined and narrowly understood to be "cooking the meals," "kids' ministry," "nursery," "maybe even some counselling" but "never the one at the pulpit." There were clearly delineated gender roles that both reinforced and were reinforced by the cultural patriarchy and hierarchy. In this system, one participant commented that men were taken "seriously and with gravitas" whereas women were neither heard nor expected to be heard. In fact, "…wives take on the background role…with preparation of the food for every event."

What was difficult to acknowledge was how the traditional Korean cultural values of patriarchy affects even the mindset of those who "grew up here with Western values" because "you would assume that they would be more open to inviting women to the table because we're taught equality. We're taught that women have value here [Canada] but it's not being practiced inside of the church." One participant added, "I think the cultural kind of roles and the gender

roles for the congregation is just so ingrained that it would take a lot to move past that."

Moreover, it was interesting to observe that no one taught us any of these gender roles. We just grew up with them and it was just understood and practiced; therefore, we assumed that it was the natural way things were done. One participant commented, "And I think it's not just an unspoken rule, but it's also like a visual. Like almost like a visual role where you only see women do certain things and when it comes to leadership, you only ever see men." Another participant expressed that women were expected to be the "best sidekick ever." She continued, "A good woman looks like that—someone serving and always like, 'Yup, yeah, yeah, man is great. Lift him up.' That must be what is good because there's no other version of woman that is permitted. That's like praise in the Korean space." In response to an interview where this issue was highlighted as a major concern, one participant wrote on the online forum, "We just weren't AWARE during that time of noticing some of the gender imbalances and discrepancies in the roles of men and women in church leadership. In hindsight, it's very obvious there were normative roles for men and women." (*Capitals* are hers.)

This patriarchy resulted in a culture of micro-aggressions against young women. These amounted to little actions here and there that were subtle and indirect but nonetheless harmful to young girls in their formative years. The following comment was made on the online forum:

> [What] I find really eye-opening, is the power of micro-aggressions. We don't necessarily find it easy to pinpoint specific events/incidents but the sentiment is there. How many of these micro-aggressions have we all experienced that the main message we have received is that we are not qualified or not able or not supposed to participate in leadership roles at our churches? Even in my personal experience, I can sit down and try to remember incidents where I felt rejected as a woman, but I can justify them as minor or insignificant or as oversight. It seems petty to bring up each memory but collectively, they are significant because there is a strong message being communicated to us. Hearing [Participant's Name] experience where she was told to be quiet or felt she couldn't take ownership of her great ideas are sad examples of how we are told we aren't welcome.

Another participant described the effect that accumulated micro-aggressions has on girls as follows: "…our whole lives being told, you're lesser, you're lesser, so you can't know as much because you're lesser, you know, and then thinking, 'Oh, I can't say anything, I'm a lesser person.'" On the other hand, the group agreed that they felt that males received praise for the same thing (or less) that a female did. For example, when a man stepped inside of the toddler ministry and literally just sat there without even interacting with the kids, he was praised for taking part and serving while the women who were actually taking care of the kids were just expected to do so without complaint or thanks.

What followed then was that, if women had a title—and these titles were also gendered—they would always be associated with the male figure in her life, usually her husband. Whatever a woman did, it was either a credit or discredit to her husband. One participant described how her mother had started an infant ministry at the church where her father served as a pastor. However, despite the fact that her father had never once contributed or stepped foot into the ministry—he simply had nothing to do with it—her father got all the credit even though he

had not contributed anything whatsoever to the ministry's establishment or maintenance. What this participant found even more frustrating was that her mother was "totally okay" with this too. Another participant similarly found that all her mother's ideas about ministry were always presented as her father's: "My mom feeds so much of her ideas to my dad and that's how it gets relayed…it sucks that she couldn't say it from her own voice and be part of that table…" However, as with the previous participants' mother, her mother also did not mind this roundabout way of having her voice heard and her ideas acknowledged by cultural proxy. Unzu Lee accurately captured this sentiment, writing of her own family dynamics, "I grew up in a family where my mom sought invisibility and my father sought high visibility." (Lee 2017, 116) What seemed to be clear was that if women were represented, it was because "they're always associated with the male figure in their life." This was understandably disheartening to young women leaders who "feel like I'm not being credited…" and, unfortunately, the women who inadvertently perpetuated this cultural habit exacerbated the problem by demonstrating that it was somehow wrong for women to take credit for their work and ideas: "There's like some sort of shame to it, almost like a hesitancy to take the credit."

There were also clear, though unspoken, expectations of women and how a woman ought to behave: "You have to be really, really smart, but not obnoxiously smart where you're showing off. You have to be beautiful, but not promiscuous. You have to be loving but not necessarily angry at injustices..." Moreover, there were also expectations about how women should look:

> Similar to the corporate workplace, I think women, especially young women who are just beginning their growth, are subjected to another level of critique for their appearance when they are in leadership roles or environments where they have to present to others…I understand the influence that the outer appearance can have on professionalism and relationship management, but I think there are opportunities for improvement. Do men get subjected to the same degree of critique in the church setting?

In other words, there was a preferred female ideal and our group's discussion on this issue echoed Hee Kyung Kim's own experience, who wrote, "When women leaders deviate from these ideals and exhibit so-called unwomanly natures—being assertive, strong, or firm on their boundaries—they receive criticism" (Kim 2017, 46). The participants clearly felt that these expectations constrained them from feeling like their true self: "It's like they only want you to be the version of yourself that they like." One participant put it this way, "…growing up, like, I can't show that I'm good at something, I have to be this ridiculous appearance of humility and modesty. I can't say what I'm good at, I have to always be quiet about it. I can't take up space," and she added, "I don't want to be a guy. I just want to be able to freely use my gifts and have it well-received."

Likewise, Ai Ra Kim described her own fierce personal battle between her inner unspoken desire to carve out her own identity and the external pressure from the Korean immigrant churches that provided her with just the right reasons to continue living in what she referred to as a "living-suicide" (Kim 1996, x). She accused the Korean immigrant churches in no uncertain terms:

> Here, the Korean immigrant churches became my saviors, supplying the fixed and rigorous apologetic principles legitimating my self-denunciation, principles such as woman's submission to man (Eph. 5:22-24) and women's silence in public (1 Cor. 14:34-35), derived from the Bible. Also,

> the church's hierarchical system and structure enhances and justifies women's subjugation to men. The more I was involved in the church and adopted the church's patriarchal teachings and doctrines, the more easily could I placate my quest and yearning to claim my own personhood. In this case, as Karl Marx proclaimed once, I became addicted to "religious opium" prescribed by the church. (Kim 1996, x)

Thus, the patriarchy of the Korean diaspora church coupled with traditional conservative Christian teachings worked together for the re-domestication and continued oppression of women. In the same way, our group agreed that the patriarchal nature of the Korean diaspora church was deeply ingrained in the culture of the local church and reinforced complementarian gender roles and expectations of women, so much so that when we were young, we weren't even aware of the influences that shaped and formed even as they bound and suffocated. Consequently, as the young and emerging generation of female leaders experienced independence and broader freedoms in different areas of life and society, they felt unjustly treated, stifled, hurt, and angered by the imposed patriarchy.

Collectivism and Conformity

Collectivism could be understood as giving priority to the group over the individual. In the case of our research study, this was the prioritization of patriarchy and the established social harmony over the needs and desires of women. Hence, collectivism, in addition to patriarchy, was another significant cultural factor that limited women's roles to the domestic sphere in the Korean diaspora church. We also found that collectivism was also intertwined with the expectation and pressure to conform to the patriarchy. One participant

immediately identified collectivism as a major cultural challenge in response to the very first interview. She wrote:

> Hearing this interview brought a couple ideas to mind, which are powerful "shapers" of how we interpret our ability to become leaders in the diaspora church. First, is the idea of collectivism. In my experience, church and culture is so intertwined, it was hard to decipher sometimes what expectations were biblical versus cultural. Collectivism is such a powerful cultural construct, I think not only because that's how the church has thrived but also because that's how our immigrant parents were able to feel any sense of community. Thinking through it a little, our desires as young women, to sit at the table with our fathers to lead and guide the direction of the church must have been such a scary thought to our parents' generation. Change is scary and feels like a disruption to their "norm." It is with this spoken or insinuated message that many of us have shied away from being participants in various opportunities to serve.

This collective mindset of the Korean culture ran deep, and the participants further shared how they felt suffocated because of it. Moreover, "…that collective direction is always set by the patriarchy, so it's just like layers upon layers of women not feeling free to do what they want." This collectivist behaviour was also reinforced by the greater Korean community of churches. Denominations and church affiliations were brokered through male-centered relationships and the fact that the local church was "part of a greater alliance," became a factor in limiting progress for women in leadership as local communities were expected to conform to others in the collective denomination. Hence, the community of Korean diaspora churches, not just the local Korean diaspora church, made it difficult for women to rise to the highest levels of senior leadership.

Interestingly, this collectivism was also much more internalized in us than we realized. It was this cultural value that kept members of the group feeling

isolated, as if we could not share our experience and true feelings with others, for fear disrupting the system of how the church had always been run. The following extended quotation from one participant described how she felt when she realized that her experience was much more common and prevalent than she had imagined:

> I think that the first thought that comes to mind is just like how shared our experiences are across different churches, like different walks of life. And if it wasn't for this study and hearing everyone's interviews and comments, I don't think I would have realized the extent of all our experiences and whether it's, like, frustration or hope, I just wouldn't have realized how big it was. And I know—I think it's a topic that not a lot of women share with one another or with men or, like, anyone, really. I think it's, like, something you, kind of, internally have within yourself or, like, your closest friends and partners. But I think, at the end, you don't want to be labeled as someone who complains or shares frustration. So, I don't hear it from a lot of other people. So, I think that was my first thought. Like, "Wow, a lot of us go through the same things." I went through those same experiences, had the same thoughts.

She had not wanted to speak up because she had wrongly assumed that she was the only one who felt dissatisfied and uncomfortable and expressing her individual discomfort was not worth upsetting the status quo. Clearly, the pressure to conform and not be disruptive in a collectivist community was strongly felt though not voiced.

Our journey together as a research group helped us recognize that we all had felt this in one way or another. Therefore, collectivism and conformity were cultural factors identified by the research group as a hindrance to both bringing awareness to the experiences of young women leaders and working together to bring about change for future young women leaders in the Korean diaspora church. To be clear, the concern was not that there were social expectations; it

was reasonable to expect both men and women who attend church to be kind, polite, cordial, and carry themselves in a socially acceptable manner of the home culture. The issue was that the social expectations imposed upon women were not neutral and were proving to be harmful and limiting for young women in the Korean diaspora church.

Spiritual Authority & Interpretation of Scripture

Another consequence of cultural patriarchy was that the men are the "gatekeepers" of spiritual knowledge and authority. Therefore, women were hesitant to assert themselves as leaders and were conditioned to defer to men. Hannah Ka, who was a stay-at-home mom with a theological degree at the time of her conversations with a group of highly educated lay women of her congregation, explained:

> …these laywomen, although highly gifted in various aspects of ministry, did not see themselves as leaders of the church. They were more inclined to passively receive guidance from male clergy and other leaders. When nominated for leadership roles, most of them expressed uneasiness and hesitancy and frequently declined leadership positions, not only because of their own lack of confidence but equally because of the established cultural expectations of women in the church. (Ka 2017, 165)

I found that our group, including me, expressed the same hesitancy when it came to taking on leadership positions. They knew they were qualified to take on certain roles but confessed that it felt awkward to speak up. We wondered where this uneasiness to lead came from and some commented that it may have been because we had never had it demonstrated for us. We never saw women leading from senior leadership positions.

Moreover, this hesitancy to lead was connected to scriptural authority which was often used to reinforce the patriarchy. One participant shared that she doubted her own reading, understanding, and overall knowledge of the Bible. She dared not question the traditional interpretation of the biblical passages that spoke against women being teachers and leaders in the community. She admitted that she had never openly asked about those difficult passages because she did not want to cause trouble and be disruptive. The other women in the church didn't seem to mind or complain, her mother was part of that system, and so she also just went along with it, which demonstrated how strong the collective mindset was. This collectivism coupled with a sense of scriptural inferiority proved a potent deterrent to even asking questions about the biblical position on women in leadership:

> I don't know—something about female leadership in the faith-based setting. Like, sometimes I come across resistance and people interpret scripture or, like, use scripture as a way to put a halt to it. So, I don't want to be the first to ask or seek those answers because I don't want to come off as, like, I don't know and [I'm] unaware of theology or doctrine or something.

When a participant was asked why she didn't feel like asking male pastors about women leaders in the church, she answered:

> I don't want to challenge that or come across as someone who has an issue with it...I don't want to ruffle feathers. I don't want to be like the one [who says], 'This is—we shouldn't do this anymore.' It's just curiosity as to why we do it this way but I don't want to come across as like, you know, I'm taking a stab at their leadership style.

It was clear that spiritual authority was also reinforced by collectivism and patriarchy. She also added another comment saying that she was afraid to speak up and be told that "feminism is a sin" or "you don't know scripture." Here, we

saw the powerful effects of patriarchy, hierarchy, and cultural collectivism as they all worked together against young women leaders in the Korean diaspora church.

Concerning the use of scripture to keep women from positions of leadership, another participant commented, "And the worst part is when anybody, any woman, says anything about it, they turn to the Bible—Proverbs 31. Do not pull the Bible on me, not because the Bible is wrong, but because the context you're using it in is in a way that will suit your needs." Likewise, the following was a written response on the online forum on this same issue:

> Looking back, it makes no sense to me that men should have more space and importance even in church groups. Reminds me of the passage in the Bible that may be misused to uphold these patriarchal views in church: 1 Corinthians 11:1-15. It angers me to hear about these double standards against women 😑 especially in the church.

The participants' sentiment reminded me of Jennifer Bashaw's observation of her seminary students who, "…defend the decisions and worldviews with their interpretation of the Bible. If they were going to look at women differently, we were going to have to work on biblical interpretation first and foundationally" (Bashaw 2020, 18). The challenge that women faced in the Korean diaspora church was that men were the ones with the spiritual authority to interpret Scripture and, as one participant summed up the authority of the male senior pastor, "He is the law and that's it." This same participant wrote an extensive comment sharing how she strongly felt that we, men and women, "…uphold these ideas of what a good Christian Korean woman should be [because of] the teachings of the senior pastors as well." She further wrote, "For example, I can recall several sermons I listen about the Samaritan woman or the woman who

washed the feet of Jesus by giving up her precious oil, but I couldn't recall if a pastor had ever spoken about Deborah or Jael who in my opinion were pretty bad ass women (forgive my language lol)."

Bashaw was correct, at least insofar as our group's experience in the Korean diaspora church, when she wrote, "…the greatest tool of oppression used against women throughout church history has been the Bible" (Bashaw 2020, 18). One remedy, which was suggested in our group forum, was to educate both women and men on biblical hermeneutics.

> I also agree that more discussion about female roles in the Bible would help. Whenever I get into discussions about gender roles in the faith-based setting, my limited knowledge of Scripture and theology is what makes me go quiet. People often point to Scripture to defend their point (that women shouldn't be in any sort of teaching or leadership role in the church) and I find it challenging to question their interpretation and don't want to "challenge" the Word either.

The combination of patriarchy and the defense of the patriarchy by way of male-centered biblical interpretation has resulted in a lack of female representation in leadership roles, so much so that one participant commented that when she was a young leader, she had no idea what a female leader should look like: "I didn't have many Christian women role models at church that embodied strength and self-assurance in their own selves". Another participant added, "I don't think many leadership members simply know how to appreciate females within the church…"

How Women Uphold the System

A particularly painful realization was that women did not always support other women who pursued leadership in the Korean diaspora church. Regarding patriarchy and the assumed spiritual authority of men, one participant shared:

> I think it was taught to us and then it became habit and then, like, you just don't have the muscles to think otherwise because it's not just the men that uphold that. It's all of us, right? They can't do that without the women.

Many of the participants remembered instances in their past when older women scolded, chastised, and humiliated them for what they wore, how they behaved, and for how they overreached in the social sphere. Many were left scarred and felt ashamed and it was frankly jarring to realize how women were inadvertently reinforcing the patriarchy:

> Women upholding that whole system—if all women were suddenly, 'Hey, we want to be spiritual leaders,' then things would change. But women won't do that because they don't feel like they can or they don't want to. It's not their place. It's really the men's space. So, it doesn't happen.

One participant was particularly bothered by this and shared her own experience on the online forum:

> When you spoke of women upholding the patriarchal idea, I remembered my very early memory of a 권사님 [older, female lay-leader] telling me that I should behave calmly and not be so "rowdy " because I was a girl during Sunday school, excited for Sunday school. I remember my mom telling my discouraged self that I wasn't being rowdy, but I was outspoken and answering the teacher, and that there is nothing wrong with that. I was about five or six years old and I still remember to this day because it left such an imprint of how a girl should act in a church. I think that growing up within the church I was also really hesitant to speak up—there's that subconscious hint of shame or embarrassment which I related a lot with when you mentioned that [you were] doubting what you were saying [because I] think subconsciously we're reminded [of] the notion that girls

> are supposed to be 얌전 [reserved] or, furthermore, "support" the male leaders.

Many of the participants had such experiences where older women would either tell them directly not to behave or dress in a certain way or they would hear the back-chatter of these older women as they criticized other women pastors. One participant wrote about her experience with both:

> I remember being scolded by people (interestingly enough, by only women) for what I wore on a Sunday when even giving a 2-minute announcement or being on [the] praise [team] and as a result, just feeling another level of anxiety and shame. Wearing too much colour. Wearing too little colour. Type of shoes. Length of pants. Hairstyle. Constantly asking myself, "Is what I'm wearing today going to spark judgement?" If a woman in senior leadership dressed nicely, I would hear comments like, "She should focus more on X than her appearance," or, "Is it okay for someone in this leadership role to wear this designer brand?"…why is it often women who judge other women when it comes to appearance? Personally, this is just another thing that deters me when thinking about leadership roles in the church—especially the Korean one where I think there is an even greater emphasis on image.

This, of course, tied back to the cultural expectations of women and how a good, Korean Christian woman ought to look and behave.

While it was suggested that women who did not support other women probably had their own insecurities and had, therefore, put limits on their own abilities and projected that onto other women, the group felt that this wasn't necessarily the women's fault. Rather, we realized the following:

> When we're told we can only lead in spaces related to the kitchen or children, this really affects the confidence of women. If we can't break free from that mental restriction, we end up limiting our own potential. If women aren't told we CAN be a lead pastor how likely is it that many women would desire to? (*Capitals* are hers.)

In other words, women have largely bought into the belief that "they're supposed to be the weaker or the lesser or the submissive."

There was also a palpable sense of competition and rivalry amongst women. One young woman candidly shared, "Yeah, it just feels very catty," and further agreed with another participant writing, "It's so true how there wasn't much camaraderie amongst women in church." In her experience, young girls were compared by their physical beauty and ended up competing for attention. For example, as a newcomer at a Thanksgiving potluck, the only people who would say hello to her would be males—none of the many females present came up to her to say hello, which she found very disappointing. She surmised that women might have judged other women because they neither recognized nor released their own unconscious biases and habits. Unfortunately, when women did not believe that women should be leaders in the church and actively supported the patriarchy, the problem was compounded:

> But then the problem is there are other women who also believe women should *not* be in positions of leadership so that you're now not only fighting the men, but you're also fighting women who believe that you should not be there. And I think that is such a tough battle and that those kinds of changes are going to take a long time.

This has resulted in a hesitation to lead even in those women who were both called and capable of leading. One participant confessed:

> I am always scared to speak up because in my formative years, the reaction we probably got when we spoke was not positive nor encouraging. Either the room got quiet because the men in the room didn't know how to respond to a woman speaking, or your ideas were ignored, or a man said it "better" and therefore [it was] received "better" making us feel like maybe we don't speak eloquently enough.

However, these experiences also led to important realizations, "This makes me realize how important it is that we are aware and respond well when other young women and girls speak up. We need to be those encouragers and cheerleaders for them."

Other participants also shared their thoughts on the possibility of change, some more hopeful than others. Those who were slightly more positive about the possibility of change for women leaders in the Korean diaspora church pointed out that because the diaspora community existed within the broader context of Western culture, there was hope for change. One participant commented, "I think change will happen. I just think it'll be super, super slow and I think it'll be a very difficult battle." Another participant was less hopeful saying that she did not believe the Korean diaspora church had changed at all over the past 10 years and that she still heard very little about female pastors.

Outcomes

The journey that the research group took together was very emotional and left all of us much more aware, reflective, passionate, grateful, and intentional. We all realized that there had never been an opportunity to talk openly about our experiences until now. Not only were we more aware of our own experiences and how they had shaped us but also that we were not alone in our experiences; we were more aware of each other. One participant wrote, "Hearing your story and experiences normalizes a lot of the things I felt at church too. It emphasizes the inequality and oppression of women in the church from a young age, which is

very frustrating and unfair," and another responded directly to an interview writing:

> Thanks for sharing [Participant's Name]! I felt so frustrated for you when I was listening to your past experiences. I can't believe you had to go through those baffling scenarios and conversations but at the same time, a part of me is not surprised anymore because this study has revealed just how common and shared these experiences are.

The individual interviews, online group forum, and the final group interview were spaces where we could reflect on our own past and openly voice the thoughts that we had never before shared with other women. Ultimately, there was a sense of gratitude for each other and the vulnerability and trust that was extended as we shared our stories and experiences. I was personally grateful for the women and the intentional way that they interacted with me and each other throughout the research study.

There was also a sense of loss. One participant lamented the lost time saying, "I wish we had all known at the same time, because if we did, we would not be in the situation we are now…" This sentiment was felt and shared by everyone. We all found it odd and surprising that we had never actually spoken about our experiences until now and, for all of us, it felt like an "awakening" to talk about them so freely with each other. It was validating to know that "…I'm not the only one going through it and I'm not crazy." It was clear from the women's comments and the responses in the closed online forum that the opportunity to share openly was both refreshing and enlightening. It was as if an emotional dam had burst, and we were finally allowed to speak freely. We felt enlightened in the sense that we had never realized just how similar our

experiences and frustrations were because we had never been so open with one another. In a very real way, we had all suffered alone. One participant came to the following realization:

> I think listening to these stories, it really clicked for me, like, I can't live like this. I can't—this constantly being told to me that I can't be myself and I can't use my gifts to serve, and it's just implicitly damaging to my self-confidence and my self-esteem. And so, I feel like going somewhere that has room for me to grow and speak is a lot better for me. So, until I feel like there's people talking about the oppressive role of women in Korean churches or church in general, I don't have a ton of hope yet. Like maybe 5 to 10 year, things will be different.

Another participant added that she realized that there were just so many "fingers pointing at me and telling me I was wrong, telling me I was going against the hierarchies on church," and another further commented that she had not realized how much of the Korean culture was ingrained in her until participating in the research group, "I didn't realize just how much of the Korean culture I've internalized…And I've internalized it so much and, I guess, never questioned." We were all clearly formed by the culture we grew up in. We also noticed how the internalization of these cultural values had become hardwired and second nature in us, thereby influencing our behaviour. One participant remarked:

> I really realized how little I speak up and speak up for myself and how guilty I feel if I ever push my boundary with others. And it's kind of a prison cell where you feel like you're doing something wrong for advocating for your own self. And it's, like, really not good for us.

In a very poignant moment of sharing, another participant also shared:

> I just see or feel like there was this unfortunate outcome where impressing strong cultural values and twisting it with religion and faith has resulted in a lot of pain in our generation and a lot of pain in all of us.

The sharing was powerful but, at the same time, heart-breaking and one of the young women found that the interviews were hard to watch. She had to rewind a few times because certain moments became too emotional. Her comment was, "I'm sad that this conversation didn't happen earlier."

After the first round of interviews and group forum responses, many expressed that they felt, "…distraught and demoralized and disheartened… grieving the life that we could have had if we possibly were told, 'You are okay to be who you are and you don't have to hide yourself to be palatable for other people.'" However, as the interview cycles progressed and the conversations filled out, the group moved from despair to hope, but not without some reservations. For example, one participant offered an insightful comment of how the time of sharing had revealed that our experiences had left us with "trauma." She observed, "It paints such a clear picture of how church has given us some kind of trauma, because it affects us and how we are living our day to day lives. And I don't think that's a good thing." This was surprising to me because I had never even considered that my experience in the Korean diaspora church would qualify as trauma. However, many resonated and agreed with her statement and I also began to understand that years of micro-aggressions were indeed traumatic and had even hardwired us to behave and respond in certain ways.

The conversation about trauma also led the group to realize that this opportunity to talk openly had given us the chance to acknowledge how we were raised and brought us to a point where we could mourn. This also surprised me because I had never thought that my experiences needed to be mourned; hence, I

had also never considered that mourning our experiences could be a part of the healing process that would help us lead more authentically as we embraced our past and looked to our futures with hope. One participant put it this way:

> There's a period of mourning, and I think that's what this discussion and these talks are really offering for me personally—to acknowledge and mourn. This is a part of my story, you know, my journey with my faith and I think there is a period to mourn that.

A good portion of the conversations also addressed how many of our participants had already left the Korean diaspora church. Our stories had drawn out some deeper emotions and helped us identify the reasons behind choices that we had made in response to our experiences. One participant shared, "And something in my heart that I feel and know deeply inside of me…I don't fit into this mold that I've been pushed and pressed into," which was echoed by another comment about how we were "…not being allowed to be ourselves, not being allowed to be people, not being allowed to be seen as who we are rather than who we're supposed to be or who they want us to be." This sense of feeling suffocated and stifled drove many of us to leave the Korean diaspora church. Of the nine participants, six were attending or serving in a non-Korean Church, two were not as involved, and one was trying to find her place as a younger leader. One participant shared:

> I felt so much like an outcast in that culture and so much oppression, and I felt like I couldn't be authentically who I thought I was meant to be…is that [leaving] the only solution or is there any way that we can change the framework? I think it's sad, but a lot of us felt like we had to leave in order to feel like we were fulfilling our calling. And I wonder if there is a place for us to try to come back or at least put more of an influence on the next generations and allow more opportunity and allow, I guess, a space

> for young women to not have to go through what we went through. Like, how can we pave something meaningful?

In other words, we did not feel that there was a place for us in the Korean diaspora church and so we left. But could there be something we could do in the future for other young women in the Korean diaspora church?

In response to this question, there were also some very positive answers. All the participants expressed that the group sharing was authentic and genuine, and one participant found that she was very encouraged by how the women were strong and willing to share from their experiences. She commented, "I see a lot of women who are saying, 'I survived, I can do this,' and, you know, I see us being able to make more of an impact, a positive impact by having these kinds of discussions and gathering ideas of how we can do that." Still, the overall sentiment was that though change may be possible, it would be difficult: "It's just the way it is and I think that it's always been that way, it's going to be that way and it *is* that way. I think that's something we don't even think about." To be fair, we also recognized that part of the challenge was how we viewed and carried ourselves as women leaders:

> In our lifetime, I mean, we're definitely dealing with the short end of the stick…we've been so entrenched in saying that you shouldn't be so selfish, you shouldn't speak up about your needs, think about the collective, think about the church, think about everyone else. And we're always trying to understand, empathize with everyone else except ourselves. Growing up in that mentality, I feel so guilty and sinful for advocating for myself and it's hard to see a way out.

When we wondered together about what we could do about the patriarchal narrative, one participant responded: "Start a new one. Raise awareness of the narrative that we grew up with and kind of figure out who and how we all

contributed to it." Another participant added that she now felt a deeper personal conviction to reflect on what her calling was in contributing to the "cultural shift," given that we had identified what had hurt us so much as we were growing up in the Korean diaspora church, acknowledged our experiences, and realized how common these experiences were in our community.

On another positive note, the participants also felt much more liberated just by having shared our personal experiences in this group setting. We had never before had the opportunity to share freely and had never been invited to do so. Hence, the invitation to talk about this topic and to do so freely was affirming and validating because we now knew that what we had felt was not an anomaly but rather the norm for so many young women growing up in the Korean diaspora church. Together, we affirmed for each other that, "You don't have to change who you are to fit into a Korean idea of what a good person is, or a good Christian girl or woman is."

Ultimately, the final group interview expressed hope. As Korean diaspora women, we realized that "…we can be free from this limiting gender role mindset." One comment on the online forum expressed, "One thing that I AM encouraged by is the number of male allies and advocates rising, who are growing into their awareness of seeing beyond the existing systems/structures and the "boys' club" mentalities to welcome the 'others'. Let's not lose hope!" (*Capitals* are hers). One of the final comments on the forum worded it this way, "I am hopeful that having these kinds of conversations can not only heal, but provide opportunity for openness and change for the better." In the end, we all felt that

one day, though it may be slow in coming, there was hope for the Korean diaspora church that there could be, "Synergy, men and women working together, working with each other's strengths, not talking down about some kind of thing that we should both be doing, but building on each other."

Conclusions & Implications

Conclusions

The research project was a genuine and authentic time of sharing for the participants involved. The women were invited personally and asked to bring their experiences and unfiltered thoughts to the group. Personally, it was the first time that I had intentionally and openly addressed the challenges that I had faced as a younger Korean Canadian female leader in the Korean diaspora church, and this proved to be true for the rest of the participants as well. It quickly became clear to all of us that we had never had the opportunity to talk openly about the culture of the Korean diaspora church and we all wondered why we had never spoken to anyone else about our experiences. In fact, one of the first questions raised by our time together was why it took us so long to talk to each other about our experiences.

It was also apparent that our experiences growing up in the Korean diaspora church had indeed shaped and formed us, influencing how we perceived ourselves, behaved around others, and carried ourselves, even today. In the very first round of interviews, the women who were being interviewed admitted that they had never really thought about how their experiences growing up in the

Korean diaspora church might have affected them. We had also never openly questioned why the church culture was so gendered and it made us wonder how many other sisters and friends had experienced the same hurt and frustrations: how many had suffered alone like we had? It was ironic that, "Church is supposed to be a place where we are able to share our burdens and yet, we're in a study that studies the very burden that is hidden for being the person that God created us to be."

There were clear cultural factors in the Korean diaspora church that shaped the young women leaders in our research group. Through the one-on-one interviews, the responses to the interviews, the online interaction, and the final group interview, we identified the following cultural challenges as the most prominent in the Korean diaspora church: patriarchy, collectivism, spiritual hierarchy, and the reinforcement of cultural norms by other, usually older, Korean women. Being able to name and identify these factors was an empowering realization and sharing our stories gave us the opportunity to give voice to our frustrations and challenges—all those moments that had left us feeling stifled. It also provided us with the opportunity to grieve and lament what could have been, to mourn our negative experiences, and then gather strength to consider what the future could be like.

Three of the participants had daughters and one had a university-age sister who she was thinking about during our time together. However, not only for our immediate loved ones but also for the younger generation of women who were currently growing up in the Korean diaspora church, we wondered what changes

could be made so that they would not have to experience the same things we had gone through. One of the most rewarding takeaways from our time together was that because we were now more aware, we could also be more resolute in carrying ourselves with boldness and in purpose, intentionally claiming the space of leadership that God had called us to for our daughters and the young women who were currently in our sphere of influence. For one participant, this meant being intentional about being more vocal in sharing her opinions with her colleagues and another participant shared that she wanted to be more supportive and encouraging to other young women in her community and circle of peers.

Personally, these conversations were very affirming. Though we were revisiting some painful, confusing, and even humiliating moments in our life, we found a mutual support system where we could process and validate our experiences. I found an unexpected source of strength and sense of purpose in these conversations and, as a result, I found myself more confident and resolute *in* that confidence. As we wrapped up our time together, the sense from the group was that it had been a deep, full, and rewarding time; the beginning of healing and drawing from a deeper strength for us all.

Implications

The research project created an opportunity for genuine conversation which led to recognizing our hurt, acknowledging our past, and growing in resolve to move forward with intentionality. One of the participants made an insightful statement about how she would begin by changing her perspective of herself and considering what small steps she could take so that she would not,

even inadvertently, contribute to the cultural systems that had suffocated us. Seemingly small things like speaking a word of encouragement to a young girl, speaking up for another woman, and even just asking the tough questions would be a good start to get others to join the conversations. For the participants with daughters or young women in their families who they wanted to influence, this meant that we would carry ourselves without apology and with confidence, knowing that we were called by God to lead despite the limitations of culture.

We were all hopeful, however, to varying degrees. Certainly, we were all much more hopeful for the rising generation of young women than we were at seeing the Korean diaspora church change. Still, the sentiment in our research group was unanimous. If the Korean diaspora church did not address these gender role issues in a constructive and transformative manner, the younger female leaders were likely going to feel frustrated and turn elsewhere for opportunities to lead and serve in ministry. Already, the older participants in our group, myself included, have left the Korean diaspora church community because the opportunities to lead were limited and frustratingly patronizing.

Now that this group has had the opportunity to talk openly, I felt that the onus was upon us to continue the conversation amongst ourselves and in our immediate circle of influence, with both men and women. Patriarchy, we realized, was not only harmful for women but limiting to men as well. One online comment insightfully observed that, "…the male/female roles in the church is limiting both ways. In thinking about how women have been pigeonholed in Children's ministry, it is also preventative for men to participate in these

positions." Thus, a healthier and more balanced approach to gender role discussions would build up the church body for both women and men.

What was obvious was that we could strive to be more observant and mindful of the girls and young women around us. Moreover, in our current ministry context—even if we were not in the Korean diaspora church community—we could resolve to lead with confidence, set an example, and be part of the Korean female representation of leadership that was so lacking when we were growing up. Moreover, I believed that the onus was upon us to seek out, mentor, and uplift other young women and challenge them to become the leaders that they were capable of being. There was an opportunity here to reframe the narrative, learning and growing from our past, and establishing a platform for our rising generation of young Korean Canadian female leaders of the Korean diaspora church.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION

Summary Overview

This portfolio is the culmination of a journey that examined my past leadership experiences through the lens of cultural constructs and systems. I realized that the cultural environment in which I grew up and where I had served for over a decade had shaped me as a leader. With this action research project, I wanted to see if other young women leaders in the Korean diaspora church were also affected by our culture, and I also wanted to see how we were shaped and formed by it.

The findings showed that there were cultural factors such as patriarchy, collectivism, spiritual authority, and female support of the patriarchy that were some of the most challenging barriers to the young women in the research group. We also realized that we never had the opportunity to talk openly about our experiences. However, when we were able to do so, we were encouraged by the stories that were shared because we realize that we were not alone in our experiences. Through our time together, we were able to pinpoint some of those cultural pressures and while we weren't enthusiastic about the probability of cultural change in the near future, we were resolved to be more intentional about how we carried ourselves in our current leadership roles.

Research Purpose

Insofar as the purpose of the research project was to determine the challenges that the cultural constructs of the Korean diaspora church presented to1.5 and 2nd generation Korean women, we did determine what the strongest cultural factors were. We were also able to determine how those cultural factors impacted us as young women growing up in that environment and how it shaped our view of leadership. It wasn't easy to talk about these issues and even after the interviews were completed, I found myself reflecting and re-processing on my own experiences through a different perspective, but it was helpful and ultimately, much more informative. I personally felt that I had finally understood my own journey from a fuller and more informed process. Through the classroom discussions, I was more equipped and resourced, and through the research project, I had the experiences and wisdom of the other women to draw from. The final group interview was especially encouraging and rich and confirmed that the research project was also a reflective experience for all the women involved. That was a very rewarding moment for me.

For this research project, I limited the number of research participants to nine young women but for future studies, I would look to enlarge the data source to get a better idea of how women experienced the Korean diaspora church culture from a broader pool. I would also want to extend the invitation to those beyond my circle, though I did think it was important to begin the conversation here. I would also want to dive a little deeper on what the young women thought about how the older women, in particular the women who upheld the patriarchy,

were shaped by the culture. I would also be interested in hearing directly from older 1st generation women of the Korean diaspora church to see where opinions, experiences, and perspectives converged and differed.

Enlightenment and Embrace

The following quotation by C.S. Lewis shared what was so enlightening about this action research project journey:

> Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do no share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one.' (Lewis 1960, 65)

In our case, it was a shared burden that we were all carrying since we were little girls. Growing up, we had felt alone in carrying this burden of frustration and struggle. We also hadn't realized how much this burden had bent us. We were not encouraged to stand tall as leaders but rather forced to stoop low and step to the side even as we dutifully took on the typical womanly leadership roles. However, as we discovered that we had all experienced similar things and had also felt similarly frustrated and stifled, it was exactly that expression that Lewis describes. We had found a community and realized that we weren't alone.

I was surprised at how emotional the journey was. I had expected that there would be frustration, even anger, but I hadn't expected that the participants would use words like "grieve," "lament," "mourn", or "saddened." But we were sad, and we acknowledged and embraced all of it. We were sad for our young selves who didn't know how we were being shaped and bent even as we lived

through the microaggressions and shame. We were also sad for others, our own friends and peers with whom we had grown up, who had experienced the same humiliation and shame that we had all felt. I was sad for my female youth students and wondered if I had somehow inadvertently contributed to their burden. I had always been intentional about giving them leadership opportunities but perhaps I could have done more. We grieved, lamented, and mourned our own upbringing, wanting to tell our young selves that the problem wasn't us but rather the system and "they" who upheld the system.

It was important that we had the time to share openly, reflect together, and come to a place where we could acknowledge that, as women, our self-image was damaged and harmed by the same patriarchy that raised us. We were malformed. We don't have to like it, but we do have to embrace it. As one participant worded it, "This is part of my story, you know, my journey with my faith…"

A Lingering Anger

Yes, we were angry. It wasn't an explosive anger—so much of what aggrieved us had already passed—but rather an anger that was rooted in this sadness and lament. We were angry that the system was ever in place. I think we were also a little angry at ourselves for not knowing or recognizing that it was there even as we experienced it. But how could children recognize cultural constructs for what they were? We simply went along with and learned from the cultural dynamics in which we were raised. But as we grew up, and the patriarchy actively worked against us it was like, "a slap in the face."

It was the question that bothered us all. Why *would* we, why would *anyone*, give preference to leaders based on gender? It seemed so arbitrary and yet this was our lived experience and the lived experiences of our mothers, grandmothers, and so many generations of women that came before us. In the case of our Korean diaspora church, Confucian gender ideology had clearly left its mark on Korean diaspora women. We were raised in the patriarchy of the Korean diaspora church and were unavoidably, deeply affected by it. Unfortunately, this had left so many capable women leaders triggered into hesitancy and doubt even though they were qualified to hold leadership positions. It was like a cultural mindset had been implanted in us. Ka explained:

> Patriarchal cultural expectations of women in the Korean American church implicitly and indirectly diminish women's leadership roles, limiting them to women-only, or women-specific contexts, such as women's ministry, children's education, caring ministry, and hospitality…This cultural practice often results in further diminishment of women leaders' confidence, formal leadership training, and being a leading presence in the church. One core leader stated that the "saving face" culture of Asian Americans can cause disparity between the public and cultural practices and liabilities often trigger uneasiness in women when asked to accept leadership positions in the larger church context. (Ka 2017, 166)

Personally, I was frustrated and saddened by a worldview and cultural system that burdens women who would make excellent leaders so that they were uneasy to seize an opportunity when it was presented to them. I was frustrated that we were told to be less, to lower ourselves, to fit into a prescribed one-size-fits-all mold; that we were not challenged to reach for more. It was wrong that women who were called to lead were made to feel that they were overreaching beyond the traditional gender roles.

The anger and hurt also lingered because we saw the same familiar patterns of patriarchy in the current Korean diaspora church. For several of the women in the research study, this meant their own daughters were currently being exposed to the same patriarchy that had choked their ambitions and undermined their sense of self-worth. As mothers and leaders, it was their burden to mitigate the effects of patriarchy on their own daughters even as they dealt with it themselves. The anger also remained because we saw the same familiar patterns of patriarchy in other areas outside the Korean diaspora church. Conservative Christian traditions still upheld the primacy of male over female and just recently, the Southern Baptist Convention erupted when megachurch pastor Rick Warren dared to ordain three of his longest-serving women staff members as pastors (Smietana 2021). There were still may cultures around the world that frowned upon the education of girls and women, and the government of Canada's website on "Child, Early, and Forced Marriage" stated that girls as young as 15 were forced into marriage before they could reach their full potential (Canada 2021). So, yes, the anger at patriarchal systems lingered.

Trauma, Lament, Grief

I was surprised by some of the words that the women used to describe how they now understood their experiences. One participant used the word "trauma", and it gave me pause to consider how I felt about my past experiences. I struggle with applying the word to myself because I don't like to be a victim but when I think back to my experiences, they were full of micro-aggressions that resulted in

a change of behaviour and perspective that I had to unlearn. It's difficult to admit but my leadership journey in a patriarchal system was traumatic.

We also talked about lamenting and grieving what we did not have. The women felt that their male counterparts had so many opportunities and the support of the cultural system while they were left with, frankly, what was left over. Even then, venturing into the traditionally male space was neither encouraged nor easily accepted. What was difficult to accept was that we didn't recognize what didn't have until we had grown up and therefore, there was no opportunity for us to re-do or re-live that season of our lives. Yet, there was an opportunity for us to do better and encourage other girls and young women, speaking up and supporting their calling and leadership, and making space for them where we had none. This didn't make up for what we didn't have but it gave meaning and purpose to our missed experiences and was the balm in our grief and restoration after the lament.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Through this study, a small group of Korean Canadian women leaders shared their struggles with the cultural challenges in the Korean diaspora church. Our counterparts in the Korean American church also voiced how they wrestled against these very cultural challenges. And yet, we loved our home church community though we were left feeling like outsiders because we wanted to be more than we were allowed to be. Pak, who experienced this same tension and cognitive dissonance in being part of a community whose very culture limited the person you were created to be, wrote:

> The rift in understanding had to do with cultural differences between "Korean" and "American" assumptions. It was a strange juxtaposition when I heard, on the one hand, "Be with us, you are a part of us and our community of worship," and on the other hand, "You are supposed to stay bent over for now; it is not time yet for your healing." (Pak, 2015)

I felt that the same could be said for the cultural differences between "Korean" and "Canadian" assumptions. Stereotypes of Asian females still existed in the broader culture, and I wondered at how much of our own cultural upbringing had formed us so that our behaviour reinforced those very Asian women stereotypes from which we hoped to break free.

But now, it *is* time for our healing. By recognizing the roots of the gender ideology that permeates the walls of the Korean diaspora church, we have taken a step towards our own healing and claiming our voices and our stories. The opportunity to even share our stories was an important moment. We now *know*. And having these open conversations with each other released an inner pressure valve that was so tightly twisted shut by the centuries of cultural expectations. We now *know* that we didn't know. We now *know* that we are not alone.

The specific cultural factors in the Korean diaspora church that the research findings revealed, e.g., patriarchy and collectivism, didn't surprise me. What did surprise me was the implications of how much these cultural factors may have shaped us and how we viewed ourselves as women leaders. Was I so accommodating because I was uncomfortable speaking up for myself? Have I not asserted myself to claim leadership positions because I was culturally conditioned to be uneasy at speaking up for myself and taught to be wary of overreaching? To some degree, I'm still processing this. What was clear, and this was also

frustrating, was that conservative theology had also be used against women to keep us well-behaved. Kim wrote:

> When women leaders deviate from these ideals and exhibit so-called unwomanly natures—being assertive, strong, or firm on their boundaries—they receive criticism. In such contexts where self-sacrifice and suffering for others are expected of Korean American women, the theological symbol of the suffering servant can exacerbate the situation, rather than liberating them. (Kim 2017, 46)

The problem was real; the consequences were already felt. However, this is one of those problems where if the consequence is felt, then it may already be too late. If young Korean Canadian Christian women are not encouraged and empowered, the Korean church will be guilty of incapacitating their young women and rejecting their leadership. I don't believe it is an exaggeration to say that the Korean church will lose her daughters. Some have already left.

But it was not just for women that the older systems, of which patriarchy was a part, ought to be re-evaluated. What leaders must also consider is how this older structure of leadership not only deters women but the younger generation, women and men, as well. Pak shared about the current struggle in the Korean church and her candid conclusion:

> I hear older church members ask, "Where are the second and third generations going? Why can't we get them to come to church? Why can't we get them to come back to the Korean church after they go off to college?" The answer is becoming more and more clear to me: young people do not see these churches as their church. They have no ownership of the church, they are seldom empowered by the church, and we in the church seldom make room for young people and for women to express the freedom that they have found in Christ. Even as I loved the ministry during that time, I am convinced that I would not have been nurtured as a young leader or woman had I felt the original call of God on my life in that context. (Pak 2015, 133)

I think about my own personal leadership journey and realize that for so much of it, I felt alone. I *was* alone. I remember a military captain of the US Army who attended the church in South Korea where I was serving saying to me, "Lisa, next to the military, you're in the last boys' club of the world." He was right.

Top-Down Boardroom Leadership vs. Circular Horizontal Leadership

There is also germinating a question about leadership in general. Why is the western board room of men synonymous with leadership? Why isn't the south east Asian kitchen where women sort out community concerns and relationship dynamics considered a model for leadership? Who decided these things and where is the gold standard of leadership prescribed? People point to Jesus' model of servant leadership but neither the male-centered nor western model are the only expressions of Christ-like leadership. Yet, it is the dominant and authoritative one. I'm convinced that leadership needs to be contextualized and it begins with knowing yourself and leading from that core. Therefore, as the group shared our stories and reflected together, it was an important part of my authentic leadership journey to have finally addressed these cultural influences that I had previously simply disregarded.

As a second-generation Korean Canadian female, there were many cultural factors throughout my upbringing that were completely foreign to my white male counterparts. This was neither good nor bad but just the reality of a diverse global community. However, I've now realized that this reality also means that the current leadership systems, though changing, are not in my favour

as a younger, minority, female leader. What I've also realized and am still processing is that I may have developed a different style of leadership to navigate the patriarchy as a younger female. In describing her own experiences with a group of Asian laywomen leaders, Ka writes:

> The wisdom these laywomen acquired from their life experiences rooted in their cultures and traditions has enabled them to fashion a new leadership model: a shared and circular leadership in a horizontal relationship. This new model of leadership would rectify their cultural liabilities—their lack of confidence and the cultural expectations of women in taking on the responsibility of conventional leadership—that have accumulated in their life-long experience of patriarchal hierarchy in family, church, and other Korean American or Asian American contexts. (Ka 2017, 168-170)

But while this "shared and circular leadership" works well within the leadership group that Ka describes, I wonder at how well this model works when outsiders, for example, a male leader, is thrown into the mix. I would imagine that the dynamics would change almost immediately and while the women stayed in their horizontal relationship with each other, the lone male would rise just one tier above to reorient everyone into a top-down hierarchy. I would also imagine that the women would be more comfortable with this structure than having the male as part of the horizontal relational system. In the following excerpt, while I agree with Ka that there are strengths in what she refers to as servant leadership amongst her group of Asian women, she also seems to imply that this model only works when the women are in a closed system that does not include outsiders.

> As these women fully embodied this collective and collaborative leadership, they went beyond circular and shared leadership toward servant leadership. While servant leadership may be criticized as a dangerous reiteration of women's submission within the traditional patriarchal hierarchy of the Korean American church, this particular form of servant leadership has been enlightened by the exercise of wisdom

> leadership, whereby leaders allow wisdom to guide their willingness to embrace others. These women move toward servant leadership, rather than being placed at the bottom of a top-down male-centered hierarchy; the community is better served when these women are positioned in a horizontal relationship to embrace and serve others because they have the wisdom to understand. (Ka 2017, 170)

So, the question I end up asking myself is, what do I need to do in my leadership context so that I am heard and respected as a leader and not an addendum?

In my current role, I serve in a non-Korean setting that partners globally with organizations and churches. What I've noticed is how much of the western model of leadership has been exported to so many of the nations. I've also noticed that I am comfortable in this style and structure of leadership and have made my own assumptions of efficacy. There is a part of me that is slightly bothered by the fact that I am comfortable in the male-centered—western or eastern—top-down hierarchy. I'm comfortable and familiar with this dynamic, I know how to navigate it, and I wonder how much of myself is edited when I'm in these contexts due to my cultural upbringing.

Furthermore, as a Korean Canadian female in a leadership role, there is also the real concern of becoming part of the system that shaped and formed me. I have often wondered if somehow, by growing up in the system, we were complicit in upholding the very same system that suffocated us. It's a twisted thing to try and wrap your mind around yet I suspect that this may be the case with the older Korean diaspora women who criticized the young women in our research group and upheld the patriarchy that oppressed them. And for the women who do succeed in becoming part of the leadership structure, how can we prevent

ourselves from becoming unwitting agents that reinforce that leadership structure? Lee insightfully observes:

> Institutions are not innocuous. Rather, they are living organisms with their own logic and culture (usually patriarchy). Although women historically have been structural outsiders, I have witnessed many women being changed by the patriarchal system once they become structural insiders. We should not be naïve about the long history of the patriarchy's persistence and its influence on everyday life. To borrow an ordained woman's concern in the church context, for example: "Will the institutional church be transformed by new winds of the spirit blowing, or am I slowly being co-opted into an institutional maintenance supporter?" (Lee 2017, 122)

I don't want to be changed by the patriarchal system, but I would be naïve to think that I was immune to the influence of how "things are done." I am, however, much more resolute in being intentional about not just "going with the flow," and I can feel this shift in my inner person.

Though I find myself in an established system in which senior leaders are predominantly male, the reality is I am not a man and people don't see me that way. My leadership is rooted in who I am, and I am shaped by my upbringing, education, and experience. As I facilitated this research study with a group of insightful women, I found myself recalibrating my own lens as the other women helped me process my experiences and see myself much more clearly as a Korean Canadian female leader. Therefore, in a very real way, this research project has been invaluable in helping me dig deeper into my personal leadership journey so that I can be a better leader.

Transferability

All leaders are shaped and formed by their environment. What I realized from this research project is that it would do all leaders well to take the time to personally reflect on how our upbringing, experiences, and current cultural surroundings shape and affect our worldview. When we are mindful of how external factors shape us, it can make us more open to the different perspectives and approaches of others, thereby opening the door to collaboration. Truly, the differences in the Body of Christ are what makes us stronger—if only they become opportunities of collaboration and not conflict.

Also, because patriarchy remains ubiquitous, the research findings are true for women everywhere. Women around the world are still considered lesser than their male counterparts, and this is strikingly obvious in developing nations. Moreover, even in cultures where women have been given opportunities to lead, the current leadership systems that are in place were created for men, by men. Hence, these systems of leadership remain the gold standard of effective leadership but are one-dimensional and not designed to highlight or recognize leadership traits that are more commonly identified with women or non-western, minority cultures. This is not to say that the current systems need to be dissolved, but it is to say that making more room for other voices, perspective, approaches, and styles of leadership would make for much more dynamic conversations and could open the door for creative and collaborative strategies that transform and impact a community in a way that a single system of leadership could not.

Always Hope

Despite the challenges, however, there is always hope. Today, we can see that there is change and perhaps the inevitable has already begun. First, there are more Korean Canadian men who are comfortable in the traditionally female domestic sphere. Many of the husbands of this second generation are very involved with both the kitchen and children, the two pillars of domestic life. They are my friends, the husbands of my friends, my colleagues and my peers. It's also important to remember that systems of leadership are products of a generation. This doesn't excuse the past treatment, assumptions, or stereotypes of women, but it does give us room to understand, forgive where necessary, and reconcile. There is a part of me that truly believes that many are unwittingly complicit because the system was inherited. I would like to believe that if most people knew the deeply detrimental effect that a patriarchal system has on women, they would move towards change.

Second, in the establishment of English-speaking ministries throughout the Korean diaspora church communities, and more female pastors being ordained in the Korean church, there have been changes that would have been impossible a few decades ago. While it can be argued that these changes are cosmetic and that an ordained female pastor's role is still limited by the undergirding culture, it is a step in the right direction. One participant in the research study commented:

> I can't speak for everyone but in my personal observations, 1st generation Korean ministry women seem complacent or even openly accept this structure and status quo whereas 2nd generation English ministry women see and feel the room for improvement.

There is even evidence that change had already begun in the decades prior. Kim writes the following about some of her observations of the Korean church in the mid-1990s:

> However, there has been some improvement in women's status in Korean church. Although their number is still very small, some women do participate in church administration and decision making as members of committees, councils, and boards. Women are sometimes appointed as chairpersons of committees. But by no means is their full potential tapped. (Kim 1996, 72)

While there are still many aspects of the Korean church that have not changed since Kim wrote her book in 1996, there has been an increase of Korean women being ordained, including me, in addition to an increase in seminary enrollment. Though the change has been slow, my own personal journey and the growing number of leadership journeys of other women suggest that change is indeed coming. At the very least, the fact that women are emboldened and inspired to speak about their experiences is an important first step of the change that we want to see. Our own research group ended our time with cautious optimism and personal resolve.

Personally, I am also hopeful because I have been the beneficiary of male senior leaders who did advocate and support my own leadership journey. They weren't mentoring relationships, and I would describe them to be socially distant due to the age difference and traditional gender assumptions in our culture, but they were leaders who opened doors that I could not have on my own. I was young and I was female, and they weren't. Yet they made space for me to learn and grow as a leader despite the cultural norms. Moreover, I have had many male

allies and advocates along the way, including most recently the professors at Tyndale, my peers in our cohort, and the team I currently serve with. The point is that it would be important to not only connect with other women leaders but also with male allies and advocates, and my experience has been that God provides the right allies at the right time along the way.

Resolute and Confident

I am more resolute. I recognize more clearly that my current leadership role is not just about me and my abilities but also about all the women, including my mother and my grandmothers, who have gone before me. It's also about the rising young women leaders coming after me who feel the call to leadership deep in their hearts and are just looking for an opportunity to grow in that capacity. I feel a sense of responsibility in my resolve to do the best I can for them; to stand my ground and not shrink back for their sake as much as mine. I'm not sure if this is appropriate, but it's how I feel. Pak describes this sentiment accurately in the following excerpt:

> But I know I need to stand. I need to stand not only for myself, but also for the cloud of witnesses who have gone before me, who have paved the road and broken through the low ceiling so that I could stand tall. I need to stand for the young Korean American girl who doesn't know where her call to ministry is coming from and doesn't know any women in a pastoral role but still senses that call. (Pak 2015, 134)

A good friend of mine once reminded me that I can't represent every non-dominant category around the leadership table. What she meant was that I can't represent women, Asians, young leaders, minorities—I may live in that intersectionality, but I can't bear that burden alone and those who invite me to the

leadership table don't get away with "checking all the boxes" because I'm there. I agree. There is a bigger concern about leadership and global representation that is beyond the scope of this research project.

There have been a few moments when I was silent—I remember thinking that it wasn't "worth speaking up" or that it would cause "too much trouble." Now, I think differently especially because I'm currently in a position where I have established relationships with other leaders and I feel that my voice is valued and heard. There are many leaders who see the value of empowering women in their giftings to lead according to God's calling. There are many people in my current circle, women and men, who support my leadership and are advocates for women in leadership. These wonderful champions, peers and friends, have been a source of encouragement and strength throughout my personal journey. A sincere word, a prayer, or a listening ear from such allies are enough to hope for the change that I am more and more certain is coming.

A Final Word

I come away from this journey feeling much more centered and affirmed in my calling. I also realize that being a younger Korean female leader today and standing in that leadership space is part of my unique calling. If I don't embrace all that I am, it is essentially a rejection of God's leadership calling on my life. He calls me to lead as He created, not as how others expect me to be. There is a tension though and it's not always easy to remain in that kind of space. For all the Korean diaspora women leaders who have to fight the inner battle to overcome imposter-syndrome, represent Asian women against the existing stereotypes, and

navigate a leadership structure that they did not establish, I am encouraged by their strength and inspired to remain resolute in my calling to lead. God had called and equipped me to lead, I am a leader, and I have indeed earned the right to be at the table.

It also strikes me that if we can remain in the tension and discomfort for just a little while longer, acknowledging God's sovereignty in creating us as Korean women in the 21st century, we can be agents of the change we so desire. Perhaps our marginal status can afford us a unique place in the conversation in these new times. Perhaps our marginal status can paradoxically give us power and voice even as we exist between the two often clashing cultures that we call home.

I've also learned that my life experiences are part of God's continuing curriculum to equip me to be a better leader in the real-life, fast-paced, ever-shifting world. Consider Lee's thoughts below:

> Although I am quite a principle-oriented person, I have learned that different circumstances require different styles and types of leadership. For example, some contexts do not allow time or place for collaboration and may demand quick and decisive leadership. Some other contexts may require all stakeholders be involved in the time-consuming discernment process to reach an agreeable decision. How do we know what type of leadership is called for which contexts? I believe that our lived experience is the best teacher of such wisdom and that we can attain it if we pay attention and consciously reflect on our life lessons. (Lee 2017, 123)

Like Lee, I too feel that I am a principle-oriented person, but my leadership journey has taught me to not let those principles hold me captive. Rather, as a human being of free agency, I have the ability to choose how I relate to my principles and those principles are rooted in my relationship with God. That's what it all comes down to. I am the best leader that I can be when I acknowledge

how God has created me and embrace all aspects of the personal journey that it entails. This hasn't always been easy but, truthfully, it has been a good and full journey thus far, and though I'm unsure of where the road will take me, I am resolved to stay the course.

To all the women who have gone before all of us, I'm grateful for your resolve, confidence, and sacrifice. To all my sisters who are currently on their own leadership journeys, I'm grateful for you as fellow pilgrims as we make our way one step at a time, one day at a time, fulfilling our respective callings. To all the young women who are rising leaders, I am confident that you will indeed rise to the challenge. I only hope that our example is inspiring and encouraging to you. Finally, may all who are called, with God's grace and favour, find that the road rises to meet us on our leadership journeys every step of the way.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Information Letter

Information Letter Regarding Research on the

Cultural Constructs in the Korean Diaspora Church Context and the Leadership Challenges they Present to 1.5 and 2nd Generation Korean Women

and request for our consent in participating in this study.

In the 21st century, Korean Diaspora 1.5 and second-generation young women are finding their voice and place and there is now opportunity to explore what young Korean Diaspora women have experienced in the leadership structure of the Korean diaspora church.

This Action Research Project will invite a core group of young Korean Diaspora Christian women to participate in an online forum. Select participants will be interviewed, i.e., interview-participants, about their past experiences and observations of women leadership while growing up in the Korean diaspora church, in addition to their current views on the matter as young Korean Diaspora women of leadership capability and potential. Their interviews will be posted on the online forum and the remaining participants, i.e., responder-participants, will be encouraged to share their reflections, thoughts, comments and discuss, in relation to their own experiences, the content of the three posted interviews. The goal is to discuss the cultural challenges, share mutual stories in support and encouragement, and consider the possibilities of change for women leaders in the Korean diaspora church.

I invite you to participate this online forum and community which will be active for four (4) months during the months of June, July, August, September and October of 2021 (we may start in late June, which would take us to mid/late October). If you agree to participate in the online community and are selected as one of the three interview-participants, the three interviews can be scheduled at your convenience over video chat. Each interview will occur once a month and will be posted for discussion with the rest of the online community. The questions will be about your personal past experiences (including observations), current perspectives and future projections regarding the subject matter of the research study. You will be invited to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable. Finally, all participants, interviewees and responders together, will have a wrap-up Final group interview to share concluding comments and thoughts.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you will be free to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence. You are not waiving any legal rights by choosing to participate in this research study.

After the completion of the interview and the online community discussions, the data will be analyzed and collated before being included as part of the research portfolio. Thereafter, the final thesis will be presented to the faculty at Tyndale University in 2022 and may also be presented in subsequent publications, conferences, gatherings. The outcomes of the research study will also be readily available to you upon request.

This study will conform to all the requirements of Canadian ethical guidelines as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and the *Tyndale Research Ethics Policy Manual.*

Finally, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to direct them to me, Reverend Lisa Pak, at or you are free to call me at . Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at

Thank you for considering participating in this research study. Your time and insight are greatly valued.

Sincerely,

Reverend Lisa Pak

Appendix B – Research Study Consent Form

Cultural Constructs in the Korean Diaspora Church Context and the Leadership Challenges they Present to 1.5 and 2nd Generation Korean Women

Name (please print):

_____

1. I have read the above Letter of Information outlining the purpose and details of this research project and have had the opportunity to ask any relevant questions and address my potential concerns.

2. I understand that I will be participating in a study that involves sharing my personal experience as a 1.5 or 2nd generation Korean Diaspora woman who has experience in the Korean diaspora church context, either as an interviewee or a responder in the online community forum. I will be asked questions about my past experiences, my current views and my projections on future possibilities regarding the opportunities, examples and experiences, personal or observed, of women leaders in the Korean diaspora church.

3. I understand that full participation entails; possible three (3), half-hour (30 mins) interviews with prescribed questions; active participation in the online community forum; and a final half-hour (30 mins) wrap-up interview.

4. I understand that my participation in the research study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence. I am not waiving any legal rights by participating in this study.

5. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality. The data and research results may will be published for the purposes of the Doctor of Ministry Research Portfolio, other publications in a different format and may also be presented at conferences and gatherings. Any such presentation of the data will not breach individual confidentiality. Should I be interested, I am entitled to a copy of the research findings.

6. I understand and am aware that questions or concerns about participating in the study can be directed to the researcher, Lisa Pak, at or , or the supervising professors, Dr. Michael Krause at Dr. Mark Chapman at , or Dr. Narry Santos at Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this study as an interviewee on the subject matter of the *Cultural Challenges of 1.5 and 2nd Generation Korean-Canadian Women in the Korean-Canadian Church Context of the Greater Toronto Area:* YES ___NO ___

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C – Interview Questions

Framing and Guiding Questions for the First Interview

Name of Participant: _____ Age: _____

Church Affiliation & Denomination: _____

Vocation: _____

Interviewer's Name: _____

Date of Meeting: _____

Start/End Time: _____

Location of Meeting: _____

(1) How were you and your family involved in church life and the community as you were growing up in the Korean diaspora church?

(2) From your past experiences and observations, what was the role of women in the Korean diaspora church? How were women leading?

(3) Share a story about the cultural factors that affect women in the Korean diaspora church. Identify the three most influential cultural factors. How do you feel this influenced your view of women leaders in church?

(4) Share a time when you had the opportunity to lead in the Korean diaspora church. What was this like?

(5) Share a story (or stories) about the influential women leader(s) in your church life. How and why did they make such a lasting impression?

(6) From your past experiences, did the Korean diaspora church encourage women leaders and provide fair opportunities?

(7) What support and opportunity were there for young Korean women leaders to be in positions of senior leadership (pastoral or lay)?

Framing and Guiding Questions for the Second Interview

Name of Participant: _____

Date of Meeting: _____

Start/End Time: _____

Location of Meeting: _____

(1) Share your leadership journey as a young diaspora Korean woman. What were the factors that encouraged you and brought you to your present point?

(2) Where are you worshipping and/or serving right now? If in a Korean diaspora church:

   a. Share how, if at all, the cultural dynamics have changed for women leaders.
   b. In what roles have you observed that young females can serve actively as leaders in the Korean diaspora church?

(3) If not in a Korean diaspora church:

   a. What prompted you to leave and join this congregation/community?
   b. How is their view on women leaders the same/different? In what roles have young women served as leaders in your current community?

(4) At your stage in life, share a formative (positive or negative) leadership experience as a young diaspora Korean woman leader.

(5) What three things are (or can) congregations/communities doing (do) to make you feel supported and affirmed as a young woman leader?

(6) How has the Korean diaspora church changed within the past 10 years regarding women in leadership and giving opportunity to young women in leadership?

Framing and Guiding Questions for the Third Interview

Name of Participant: _____

Date of Meeting: _____

Start/End Time: _____

Location of Meeting: _____

(1) From your experience and observation, are there factors that might limit the opportunity for women leaders in the Korean diaspora church? Please share your experiences that led you to this conclusion.

(2) From your experience and observation, share positive leadership experiences and/or changes that the Korean Church has made? What has the Korean Church done well to welcome young women to be leaders in their congregations?

(3) Share to what degree you are optimistic about young diaspora Korean women leaders having a strong and active voice in the leadership of Korean diaspora churches.

(4) If you could advise and/or comment the leadership of the Korean diaspora church on the future of women leaders, what would you say?

(5) What can current diaspora Korean women leaders either in or with ties to the Korean diaspora church community do to encourage the congregations to welcome and support young women leaders?

(6) What can current Korean Diaspora women leaders do to encourage younger women to seek opportunities to lead?

Framing and Guiding Questions for the Final group interview

Name of Participant: _____

Date of Meeting: _____

Start/End Time: _____

Location of Meeting: _____

(1) How has your personal experience as a participant of the online community in this study affected you?

(2) What are some takeaways, if any, from having participated in this online community?

(3) How has the online conversations have contributed to your perspective of Korean women leadership and your own spiritual journey?

(4) Has your outlook and perspective as a young diaspora Korean woman changed because of your participation in this narrative research study? If so, how? If not, why not?

(5) Are there any next steps for you as a young diaspora Korean woman leader that you are compelled to take? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

(6) What can you do to move the conversation forward?

(7) Do you have any other comments or thoughts that you would like to share?

Appendix D – Interview Stages

	Days 1-3	Days 4-12	Days 13-14
Weeks 1-2 **Topic (Past):** *Past Experience – Growing up in the Korean diaspora church context, what were the examples of women's role in the Korean diaspora church?*	Interviews with: Participant #1 Participant #2 Participant #3	Post interviews on Online Forum and facilitate conversations with Participants #4-#9, who will be the Responder-Participants. Transcribe posted interviews for Data Analysis.	Analyze Data from Interview Transcripts and Online Forum responses; Record Summary Conclusions of Weeks 1-2
Weeks 3-4 **Topic (Present):** *Current Context – Where are you now as a young Korean diaspora woman? In your opinion, has the Korean diaspora church welcomed strong women leaders into senior positions of leadership?*	Interviews with: Participant #4 Participant #5 Participant #6	Post interviews on Online Forum and facilitate conversations with Participants #1-3, #7-9, who will be the Responder-Participants. Transcribe posted interviews for Data Analysis.	Analyze Data from Interviews and Online Forum responses; Record Summary Conclusions of Weeks 3-4
Weeks 5-6 **Topic (Future):** *Next Steps – Where can the Korean diaspora church go from here? What is next for you? Do you think it is possible for the Korean diaspora church leadership structure to change? If so, how?*	Interviews with: Participant #7 Participant #8 Participant #9	Post interviews on Online Forum and facilitate conversations with Participants #1-6, who will be the Responder-participants. Transcribe posted interviews for Data Analysis.	Analyze Data from Interviews and Online Forum responses; Record Summary Conclusions of Weeks 5-6
Weeks 6-8 **Wrap-Up (Reflection):** *To what degree has the online community been helpful in reflecting on your own leadership journey?*	Wrap-Up Group Interview with: Participants #1-#9	Transcribe Final Group Interview for Data Analysis.	Analyze Data from Final Group Interview and Record Preliminary Conclusions from Weeks 1-8

Appendix E – Data Table

	Date Form	Data Storage
Interviews (One-on-One)	Video recorded (with consent) Transcript Field Notes	Electronically stored for 3 years; posted to closed online forum for 3 years Electronically stored; printed copies with notes stored with research files for 3 years Stored with research files
Online Forum Discussion Comments	Online comments to group forum	Posted to closed online forum for 3 years; printed copies with notes stored in research files for 3 years
Final Group Interview	Video recorded (with consent) Transcript Field Notes	Electronically stored for 3 years Electronically stored for 3 years; printed copy with notes stored with research files for 3 years Stored with research files for 3 years

Appendix F – Guidelines For Online Group Forum

- Participants were encouraged to respond at least once to each interview but were not forced to comment on every interview.
- Participants could choose to respond more than once.
- Participants could respond to other's comments on their post.
- Participants were given freedom to respond to the interviews according to what parts resonated with them the most.
- Participants were not given prescribed questions or detailed directions on how to respond to the interviews.

Appendix G – Data Analysis

Process of Data Analysis

- First cycle of three interviews were completed.
    - Interviews are re-watched and transcribed.
    - Summary overviews of each interview is made.
    - Notes are made of emerging themes; outstanding and unique details are recorded.
    - Interviews are posted to the online forum and participants were given 10 days to respond to the interviews.
    - Online forum comments are cross-referenced with my notes to see where there is consistency and convergence.
    - Emerging themes are identified as important factors to consider.
        - Data analysis included In Vivo, macro and deductive coding.
- Second and third cycles used the same process as above.
- Final group interview is held where the group shared their thoughts on what the research project revealed to them and how effective they thought the interviews and the space for group discussion were.
- The final Data Analysis Chart with the summary of each interview, including quotations, and the identification of themes and cultural factors is created.

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