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Korean Preachers & Worship Leaders

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Robert Chun

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Abstract

Pastor Robert Chun is the English Ministry pastor at Grace Ministries International. The English Ministry is called *The Well* and their vision statement is summed up in the tagline “Connect. Grow. Go.” The focus of the ministry is to be “lay driven, leader directed.” The ministry is unique from other Korean American English ministries in that they are neither independent nor dependent, but interdependent. His preaching and worship is characterized by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Ministry Vision and Philosophy

Pastor Robert Chun is the English Ministry Adults pastor at Grace Ministries International (GMI) in Fullerton, California. He has earned a B.A. in Pastoral Theology from Pacific Life Bible College, is in the process of receiving his M.Div. from Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, and has been ordained in The Presbyterian Church International General Assembly. Pastor Robert was previously the English Youth Group pastor at GMI but became the EM Adults pastor when Pastor Steve Rim left the position.

The English Ministry at GMI is called “The Well” and their vision statement is summed up in the tagline: “Connect. Grow. Go.” The ministry vision is broken up into these three steps: The Well seeks to be a community where people can connect with God, grow in Christian community, and go to the nations.¹ The Well exists to live out the Great Commission as outlined in Matthew 28:19-20 and it is important to note that this vision is not pushed forward by the pastoral staff but is fully implemented by the members of the congregation. In Pastor Robert’s words, the ministry is “Lay driven, leader directed.” Pastor Robert gives the following illustration to explain this philosophy of ministry:

We are not asking the church members to get into a bus that the pastor is driving; simply coming along for the ride in a ministry that is pastor-

¹ Chun, Robert, Interview by Keedai Kim. *Interview with Pastor Robert* (October 1, 2009).



*centric. Rather, I am there to offer direction and pastor vision and oversight and our church members are active in ministry. I place much emphasis on lay leadership and our Family Group (cell church) ministry.*²

His words are surprisingly refreshing yet not entirely new. It is refreshing in that he is affirming the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9). It is not entirely new in that missionary Charles Allen Clark utilized such a ministry style when he adopted the Nevius Methods for Korea: self-support, self-propagation, and self-government. The argument might be made that many Korean-American churches are very much pastor-driven. Alan Nelson, executive editor of *Rev! Magazine* suggests that such a model is harmful:

*“The typical American church reflects the evolution of the pastoral model, whereby the pastor is the center of ministry that matters. The unspoken mind-set is that lay involvement is a support role, enabling the trained professionals to be the “real” ministers.”*³

Pastor Robert would agree with Nelson and add that though the ministry staff at The Well will lead the church, the lay people mobilize it.

Church

The Well is neither dependent on nor independent from the Korean Ministry at GMI. The English Ministry is independent in that their finances are managed within their ministry, they have a defined ministry name (The Well) and not simply GMI EM, they are establishing themselves as an “adult” group and not simply as 2nd-Generation children of the adults, they have their own board of deacons with a plan to have their own session, and they have the authority to hire and fire within their own ministry.⁴ At the same time The Well is still dependent on the Korean Ministry because they are still a part of Grace Church and share in its vision, they are organizationally and spiritually under the authority of senior Pastor Kihong Han, they worship on the same church campus as the Korean Ministry, and Pastor Robert regularly seeks the advice of Pastor Han and his

² (Chun, 2009).

³ Alan Nelson, “Me To We: The end of the pastor-centered church,” *Rev! Magazine* (Sept./Oct. 2007): 65.

⁴ (Chun, 2009).

permission in making major decisions.⁵ Therefore, Pastor Robert sees The Well as neither dependent nor independent but rather *interdependent*.⁶ Pastor Robert elaborates,

*We appreciate the spiritual heritage we have at our church and choose to function within it. We value the authority and input of the KM but implement ministry in a way that is right for the demographic we are reaching. Our focus is not about being EM or KM, but about building our ministry upon a firm and clear vision of missions (which is consistent with the KM).*⁷

Along the same lines, when it comes to whether or not he pursues a “Korean-ness” in the ministry, Pastor Robert says that he does not try to think of his ministry in those terms. He looks at his ministry in terms of whether or not it is effective and if it is biblical.⁸ Pastor Robert does not ask the church members to shout out “Jesus” three times (as he has seen some do) before praying, but he does emphasize fervent prayer. He has been a part of the Korean Church long enough to appreciate its strengths and be cautious of its weaknesses. He has a positive view of the Korean Church but does not try to mimic or separate himself from it. Pastor Robert sees the group of people that God has called him to lead and does so in a way that is consistent with how God has taught him to do it.⁹

This issue of culture in worship is perhaps something that many people in immigrant churches wrestle with. In chapter 1 of “Worship on the Way” Russell Yee tackles the issue by asking questions such as “Does culture really matter? Can’t we all just be Christians in our worship? Aren’t matters of culture divisive? Doesn’t an emphasis on culture risk worshipping the culture rather than Christ?”¹⁰ These questions are rhetorical in nature and Pastor Robert would most likely respond by placing a primacy on God’s word. The Bible is placed front and center and would be the default measure of true worship. Yee is even more helpful when he says “Full and healthy

⁵ (Chun, 2009).

⁶ Emphasis his.

⁷ (Chun, 2009).

⁸ Seung-Joong Joo and Kyeong-Jin Kim, “The Reformed Tradition in Korea,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 484.

⁹ (Chun, 2009).

¹⁰ Russell Yee, 15.



worshipping communities build bridges between the cultures of their own members as well as bridges to their surrounding communities and the world at large.”¹¹ His argument here is that worship needs to be cross-cultural, especially in North America where so many cultures are found side by side.

Worship

Music plays an important role in worship at The Well. Though he is not a skilled musician himself, Pastor Robert encourages the use of instruments in worship and appreciates the influence that music has on peoples’ lives and spirits. Pastor Robert is particularly concerned with genuineness in worship and the need for excitement as well as intimacy to God in worship. He sees music as not only singing to God but also speaking truth into the congregation. Therefore he encourages the members to not only sing the lyrics but also try to understand what it means.

Space and time are equally important in the worship at The Well. It is a matter of stewardship as well as showing God respect and honor. “Taking the time and putting in the effort to make sure the sanctuary is properly setup and clean is a matter of the heart. Whether I’m using church equipment, driving the church van or cleaning the sanctuary, I should do so with an attitude of excellence and care.”¹²

When it comes to the sacraments The Well does both baptism and communion. Baptisms are done twice a year (fall and spring) and communion is done four times a year. However, since it has only been eight months since he took the position of lead pastor, Pastor Robert has not set up a consistent schedule for communion.

Preaching

Pastor Robert does not employ a lectionary nor does he refer to specific passages over and over again. He goes to 1Corinthians 11 for communion is but that is the only time he will repeat a passage. There is no specific system that he uses to cover the entire Bible in a year and he tries to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the

¹¹ Russell Yee, 23.

¹² (Chun, 2009).

needs of the congregation when preparing a preaching plan. The preaching will usually cover whole books or major segments of the Bible.

In his preaching Pastor Robert tries to get out of the way for God to show up and convey His desired message.¹³ His desire is for people to have a deep love for the word and humility in regards to its practical application. Pastor Robert is also very specific in the do's and don'ts of preachers:

“Don't go to commentaries to fill the content of your sermons. Read and re-read the passage over and over (minimum 20x) and get completely familiar with it. Read the entire context of the passage. Ask honest and probing questions. Allow the structure of the passage to dictate the structure of the message. Don't cram everything into one message; preach in series if necessary so as to spread out the content of a passage. Allow church members to experience and validate the principles of the message for themselves through specific leading questions and personal application and insight. Have a long-term approach to preaching (make a preaching plan for at least 6 months); don't simply speak isolated messages from week to week.”¹⁴

The primary response a Christian should make to a sermon is humility. Pastor Robert says, “The contemporary churchgoer is used to simply being patted on the back to reinforce the spirituality they already believe. We pick and choose our conferences and preachers like a customer looking at a menu selecting an item to satisfy a craving. Churches and Christians must not fall into the error of consumerism. In the marketplace, the customer is king; but in the church, Christ is King.”

Primary Resource:

Chun, Robert. *Interview by Keedai Kim* (October 1, 2009).

Secondary Resources:

Joo, Seung-Joong and Kyeong-Jin Kim, “The Reformed Tradition in Korea,” In *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, edited by Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, 484-491. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

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Yee, Russell. *Worship on the Way: Exploring the Need for Asian North American Worship*, Judson Press, 2012.

www.gmiwell.com

¹³ (Chun, 2009).

¹⁴ (Chun, 2009).

