

Administrative Commission of Heartland Presbytery  
For the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas  
Report to Presbytery – June 5, 2018

Introduction

We have reported to you previously on the serious and persistent conflict in the Korean United congregation. We have also reported on our various efforts to address it, including conferences with the pastor, with the elders, with the congregation at large, with outside consultants, with other presbytery members with prior experience with the church, and others. We have visited the church before, during and after worship, in meetings and informal fellowship settings. We have heard from others in the Kansas City Korean community and other Presbyterian ministers around the country of Korean heritage who know the congregation or know of it.

When we were asked to take on this work last August, we did so believing it would be possible to find peace and reconciliation, to offer this congregation a way forward. When we assumed original jurisdiction and took on the powers and responsibilities of the Session in October, we did so seeking to act decisively to correct errors of omission and commission and to prepare new leadership in the congregation. And when we invested in consulting work in early 2018, we did so attempting to find a vision for change that we ourselves were not able to see.

With sadness, we have unanimously concluded that as a congregation, KUPCK in its current form is unable to bear faithful witness to the gospel, come together fruitfully in worship, or show forth the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Obviously, that is not to say that there are not people of deep faith there, daily living out the gospel. But as a congregation, it just isn't working. Relationships are too strained. Dysfunctional systems are too established. Leadership is too lacking. Finances are too diminished. And the result has been real pain and sadness, drastic decline in membership, and a community reputation broken beyond repair.

Today, we recommend the dissolution of the KUPCK congregation and of the pastoral call. In the same motion, we recommend the presbytery begin an intentional process of discerning and planting a new ministry with the Korean-American community in Kansas City—one unburdened by the weight of painful conflict and old patterns, and one that is open to what the community needs and wants in this new day.

This is not what many in the congregation would want. Indeed, even those with whom the presbytery has worked most closely have urged us not to make this recommendation, believing that somehow things at KUPCK can right themselves. We do not believe that is possible. But that is not to say we are without hope for the mission and ministry of the presbytery among Kansas City's Korean community. **We believe this set of recommendations offers the best hope for presbytery mission and meaningful presence in the community in the years to come.**

Recommendations

1. **The Administrative Commission makes the following recommendations to Heartland Presbytery regarding the congregation:**
  - a. **That Heartland Presbytery dissolve the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas, effective June 30, 2018, upon recommendation of the Administrative Commission acting as the board of directors of the KUPCK corporate body.**
  - b. **That Heartland Presbytery, through its Administrative Commission, take all necessary legal steps to transfer control and ownership of all liabilities, property (land and building) and assets to Heartland Presbytery.**
  - c. **That Heartland Presbytery hold the property and assets in segregated accounts of the presbytery for paying all expenses related to the dissolution of the corporation, with the balance designated for possible use for new ministry with the Kansas City metro Korean community, for a period of no less than 24 months following the date of dissolution.**
  - d. **That Heartland Presbytery direct its Moderator, in consultation with the Administrative Commission, Commission on Ministry and the Committee on Church Planting and Redevelopment, to nominate a new administrative commission within 90 days for the purpose of examining the future of Presbyterian ministry in the Kansas City metro Korean community, subject to election by the presbytery at its next stated meeting. Membership in this commission may include members of the COM, CPR, the Board of Trustees, the current Administrative Commission and members of the former congregation.**
  - e. **That Heartland Presbytery direct the Stated Clerk to secure the session and congregational records and to transfer any members who wish to be transferred to the congregations of their choice in accordance with the *Book of Order*.**
  
2. **Pending approval of the recommendations found in 1. above, the Administrative Commission makes the following recommendations to Heartland Presbytery regarding the pastoral relationship:**
  - a. **That the pastoral relationship be dissolved between the Rev. Junhyoung (John) Kim and the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas, effective upon dissolution of the congregation on June 30, 2018.**
  - b. **That Pastor Kim receive severance payments of full salary and benefits through September 30, 2018.**
  - c. **That as a condition of receiving severance, Pastor Kim be required to agree to the presbytery's covenant of closure, which shall preclude his involvement in PCUSA ministry with the Kansas City metro Korean community for a period of no less than 24 months from the date of dissolution.**
  
3. **The Administrative Commission recommends that once a new Administrative Commission is elected and convenes its first meeting, Heartland Presbytery dissolve the current Administrative Commission.**

Rationale

## 1. Intractable conflict

We have already reported to the presbytery several times (cf. our written and verbal reports on November 19, 2017, February 13, 2018, and April 14, 2018) on the extensive conflict that has been present in the congregation, literally for decades. The key players in this conflict—namely a handful of ruling elders and their families—are mostly still present. Some were on the session at the time the AC assumed original jurisdiction last October. They have used their power and influence to control and not bless, manipulated process, bullied their fellow church members, threatened and mistreated pastors and their spouses, disregarded the presbytery’s oversight, and fomented distrust and disunity. In some cases, they have continued to do this, even during this period of discernment and efforts at reconciliation.

So why not just remove the “bad apples”? First, short of disciplinary process, there is little mechanism for doing that; in most cases, generalized bad behavior (rather than specific incidents of misconduct) are not easily addressed through judicial process. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these same elders and families represent much of the financial backbone of the population (which has a current active membership of 45 members). The already deteriorating situation would collapse entirely in their absence (the threat of which, not coincidentally, has been one instrument of control).

This is a problem named in presbytery reports by previous groups (COM or earlier ACs) appointed to intervene at KUPCK over the years. In most cases, those conflicts ended with no action during a lull in the conflict, or with the departure of the pastor (temporarily calming disputes but not solving the underlying issues). At this point, so much water has gone under the bridge that we do not see a way for the situation to resolve itself.

## 2. Lack of leadership

### *The current elders*

One of the AC’s earliest observations (indeed, it was observed by the COM before this AC was elected) was a serious crisis of leadership. The congregation has a total of eight elders, all men, two of whom were active on the Session. This core group had not changed in many years and does not reflect the age, gender or ideological diversity of the congregation. It was also a very closed group, with individuals within it governing the church “out of their back pocket” for a long time, often making decisions and implementing them without the collaboration of the pastor or the formalities of church order. (A ninth elder, Sunok Pai, is a woman who has served as moderator of presbytery. She was not ordained in this congregation and has not served on its session, and has generally not been included as part of its leadership. She is now in poor health.) The elders were part of the problem, and with one possible exception, we have seen no elder who offers the potential for future leadership in a different direction.

Meanwhile, pastors have been unsuccessful at bringing transformation to the congregation’s persistent problems. The church has endured a cycle of bringing in a new pastor; paying him at (or below!) presbytery minimum; reaching a point where a faction begins agitating against the pastor’s ministry, usually within a year or two; involving the presbytery until the pastor leaves or is removed. There are exceptions, but this is more common than not over the past two decades. We share this history to acknowledge that it would be very difficult for any pastor to be successful here.

### *Potential for new leadership*

One of the critical realizations we came to was that there are very few people to replenish the church's leadership. We have asked the congregational members of the Leadership Team to help us identify a group (that does not include the current elders and their spouses) that could assume leadership in a new day. Identifying three people with the appropriate gifts and standing in the congregation has been a struggle. The reality is that most potential candidates for future leadership are either tainted by the past conflicts, or aged and tired and unable to serve, or preparing to leave the congregation for a variety of reasons. And this would be very demanding work, done by a small group of people.

In a sense, it is too late. Had the presbytery begun this effort of dismantling the current power structures and training up a new group of leaders three to five years ago, something might have been possible. But there simply aren't enough people now.

### *Pastoral leadership*

The current pastor, Junhyoung (John) Kim, has made an admirable effort since arriving at the church in 2016, given that approximately one half of the congregation has worked to undermine him. His last terms of call were approved in a 19-16 vote in January. We on the AC have encouraged him to consider other options, given both the ministry environment and the financial realities of the congregation. Pastor Kim maintains that he feels strongly called by God to serve this church. He even suggested we dissolve the congregation and then appoint him to attempt a new church development with a remnant of the congregation.

But we find that Pastor Kim's ministry with the church has not been effective. The presbytery (unanimously) waived a number of requirements to receive Pastor Kim into membership, and we believe that may have been a mistake. A frequent complaint about Pastor Kim's sermons is that they are too long, they are not Reformed, and they fail to reflect the fullness of the gospel message. While we are unable to confirm all of these details ourselves (as the sermons are in Korean), we have had enough concern expressed by sources who are not otherwise opposed to the pastor that we believe there is probably merit to these concerns. We have observed Pastor Kim respond to the conflict in the congregation in ways that have not always worked toward reconciliation, but rather given the competing factions more "fuel for the fire." He has not always followed through in implementing decisions (made collaboratively with the AC) about how to handle situations.

In our tradition, call is experienced in community. Pastor Kim feels a strong individual call to service here, even though a majority of the congregation would likely now not affirm him as pastor. Sadly, we are unable to recommend that the presbytery community confirm that call, either. While Pastor Kim has deep faith and many gifts, we do not believe he is the right person to lead this congregation—or a new ministry project seeking to reach Kansas City's Korean community—into a new and different future.

A final note: We have made recommendation #2 contingent on the approval of #1; that is, if the presbytery opts not to dissolve the congregation, we do not recommend removing Pastor Kim at this time. As consultants have pointed out to us, his departure will create a power vacuum which will only allow the same forces that have created havoc repeatedly over the years to resume control and flourish. In addition, we deem it very unlikely that another pastor could be found (and we would deem it very

unwise for the presbytery to approve a new call under the circumstances). For that reason, we would suggest not removing the pastor if the congregation is not dissolved.

### 3. Financial Unsustainability

As noted above, a handful of members in the small congregation are now carrying the bulk of its financial burden. Some of these members have been withholding contributions during the current conflict as a means of protest. But even at full, regular giving, the congregation is in running substantial deficits, making significant use of reserve funds in each of the last several years, including \$25,000 in 2017. The budget approved by the AC for 2018 includes use of \$20,000 in reserves, but only funds the pastoral position full-time through June, then half-time the rest of the year (or, alternately, full-time through September only).

One painful reality for the church is that years of poor fiscal management, mostly by the clerk of Session – who was listed in corporate filings as the Treasurer, as well – has resulted in key oversights related to tax filings and payroll management. It appears that several employees/contractors (including the pastor) did not receive the proper W-2 or 1099 forms. The AC is still sorting through this with a CPA, but it appears the church – and potentially the pastor or other employees – may be liable for back taxes, interest and penalties.

The total cash assets (including reserves) of the church (mostly leftover funds from the sale of a building some years ago) at the end of 2017 were \$239,419. It is true that many of our congregations are in worse financial shape than this. It is also true that the KUPCK could *survive* for several more years simply drawing down these funds. We think that would be irresponsible stewardship.

**Survival is not a biblical virtue for a congregation.** God calls us to spiritual abundance and vitality. If the congregation were healthy, this financial situation would be less concerning because there would be enough that—with substantial changes—a thriving ministry might one day be possible. Likewise, if we deemed the congregation to be undergoing mere temporary conflict but financially secure, we would not be bringing this recommendation. But neither of those is the case with this congregation. Any survival would be short-lived. Our hope is that by acting now, the presbytery might preserve sufficient resources to identify and live into a new way of fulfilling our call to ministry and mission with Kansas City's Korean community.

### 4. Opportunities Preserved by Acting Now

*The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women, men, and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love. (G-1.10102, The Book of Order)*

Presbyterian mission and ministry, as the Constitution says, are “not designed to work without trust and love.” Any congregation is built on a presupposition of covenant fellowship. At KUPCK, that fellowship has been strained for a long time, that covenant, strained to the point of breaking. Trust is no longer present, or possible.

It would be easy to think of this recommendation as an admission of failure—the consequence of unsuccessful efforts to restore unity at KUPCK. On a certain level this is true. There will be reflection and repentance to undertake on all sides – including the presbytery’s part – in the months and years ahead.

But this decision is not really a last resort. Rather, it is an affirmative decision to act on our belief that better things are possible. We have come to know and love many faithful members of KUPCK. They have loved their church—its building and programs and music and history. But more importantly, they are capable of love for their Savior and each other. And it is for them—and for the countless others in Kansas City’s Korean community who long for true spiritual fellowship—that we make these recommendations. That community, and this presbytery, deserve an opportunity to try something different, something unburdened by the hurts of a broken congregation, something open to the new community God promises to make of us all.

It would be a very rare congregation that could recover from the situation we have described here. But it is also a rare privilege to have the resources available here to plant something new. Judiciously assigning resources, carefully stewarding the blessings of the past, investing in opportunities with real promise—this is what strong presbyteries do. We build something together. We live into hope, with courage and creativity and faith.

The longer we wait to do this, the fewer the resources will be to build a meaningful ministry for Korean-Americans in Kansas City. Our recommendation to act now is made in the positive expectation that God will bless our boldness and that lives and a whole community can be filled again with the hope of Good News.

## **Conclusion**

We come to this point with a great deal of sadness, and we know our sadness pales in comparison to that of people who have grown up in, or invested in, or been married or baptized at KUPCK. Even so, we believe the mission of the presbytery and the well-being of the members of the congregation will be best served by approving these recommendations. Church should not be the source of people’s pain. And its reason for existence should not be simply because it has existed for a long time. Our reluctance to come to this point of twilight for the church is offset by our deep conviction that this path alone offers the possibility for a new dawn.

Faithful members of the congregation have pointed out to us that the presbytery has other congregations in worse financial shape, with fewer members, which continue to exist. And that is true. But we are not aware of any where those few remaining members are in such deep conflict, with so little potential leadership, and such a record of failed attempts to make things better.

The AC has brought together experience and expertise in pastoral ministry, law, education, conflict resolution and more. We have met more than two dozen times as a group, with at least that many additional meetings or consultations with some subgroup of us. We believe we have a very clear view of the congregation’s past, present and potential future. Our feelings will not be hurt if the presbytery discerns a different path than the one we have recommended. But we believe the end result of any such path will ultimately bring us back here, and with less hope for a redemptive new beginning. For that reason, we urge you to adopt these recommendations.

TE Brian Ellison, Moderator  
TE Heidi Peterson, Clerk  
RE Harold Frye, Grace Covenant, Overland Park, KS  
TE Ron Galvin  
RE William Geary, Parkville, Parkville, MO  
RE Elizabeth McKell, Village, Prairie Village, KS  
RE Vera Phillips, St. Paul, Kansas City, MO  
TE Barbara Sherer  
TE Dwight Tawney

Because the AC continues to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the Session, we are reporting to presbytery the actions taken for the record. Since our report to the April 14 meeting of presbytery, the AC has taken the following actions:

April 19, 2018

The Administrative Commission convened a meeting as the board of directors of the corporation of Korean United Presbyterian church of Kansas. The members present, acting as the Board of Directors, took the following actions:

1. Elected the following persons as officers of the corporation of Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas:  
    Brian Ellison, president/moderator  
    Heidi Peterson, secretary/treasurer  
    William Geary, assistant secretary.
2. That the newly elected officers of the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas be reported to the Kansas Secretary of State as the officers of the corporation no later than June 15, 2018.
3. That it be reported to the Kansas Secretary of State that the directors of the corporation Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas are Brian Ellison, Heidi Peterson, William Geary, Harold Frye, Vera Phillips, Elizabeth McKell, Barbara Sherer, Ron Galvin and Dwight Tawney; and that the corporate address is:  
    Heartland Presbytery  
    3210 Michigan Ave., Suite 200  
    Kansas City, MO 64109.  
  
Further, that the list of officers along with the address be reported to the Kansas Secretary of State no later than June 15, 2018.
4. That Heidi Peterson be named registered agent for the corporation Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas and that the address of the registered agent be [her home address], and that this be reported to the Kansas Secretary of State no later than June 15, 2018.
5. That any and all expenses related to these filings be paid by Heartland Presbytery through action of the Commission on Ministry of Heartland Presbytery.

May 10, 2018

**That the Administrative Commission present the following recommendations at the June 5 stated meeting of presbytery.**

**1. That the Administrative Commission call a meeting of the congregation for May 27 at 12 noon to do the following:**

Inform the congregation of the recommendations to presbytery, notifying them of the time and place of the meeting and their right to be heard.

**2. That the Administrative Commission make the following recommendations to Heartland Presbytery regarding the congregation:**

- a. That Heartland Presbytery dissolve the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas, effective June 30, 2018, upon recommendation of the Administrative Commission, acting as the board of directors of the KUPCK corporate body.
- b. That Heartland Presbytery, through its Administrative Commission, take all necessary legal steps to transfer control and ownership of all liabilities, property (land and building) and assets to Heartland Presbytery.
- c. That Heartland Presbytery hold the property and assets in segregated accounts of the presbytery for paying all expenses related to the dissolution of the corporation, with the balance designated for possible use for new ministry with the Kansas City metro Korean community, for a period of no less than 24 months following the date of dissolution.
- d. That Heartland Presbytery direct its Moderator, in consultation with the Administrative Commission, Commission on Ministry and the Committee on Church Planting and Redevelopment, to nominate a new administrative commission within 90 days for the purpose of examining the future of Presbyterian ministry in the Kansas City metro Korean community, subject to election by the presbytery at its next stated meeting. Membership in this commission may include members of the COM, CPR, the Board of Trustees, the current Administrative Commission and members of the former congregation.
- e. That Heartland Presbytery direct the Stated Clerk to secure the session and congregational records and to transfer any members who wish to be transferred to the congregations of their choice in accordance with the *Book of Order*.

**3. That (pending approval of the recommendations found in 2. above) the Administrative Commission make the following recommendations to Heartland Presbytery regarding the pastoral relationship:**

- a. That the pastoral relationship be dissolved between the Rev. Junhyoung (John) Kim and the Korean United Presbyterian Church of Kansas, effective upon dissolution of the congregation on June 30, 2018.
- b. That Pastor Kim receive severance payments of full salary and benefits through September 30, 2018.
- c. That as a condition of receiving severance, Pastor Kim be required to agree to the presbytery's covenant of closure, which shall

**preclude his involvement in PCUSA ministry with the Kansas City metro Korean community for a period of no less than 24 months from the date of dissolution.**

**4. That once a new Administrative Commission is elected and convenes its first meeting, Heartland Presbytery dissolve the current Administrative Commission.**

May 23, 2018

Elected Ruling Elder Pan Joe Jeung to serve as commissioner to the June 5, 2018, meeting of Heartland Presbytery.