

THE KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES CIRCUIT



‘From South Korea to Kingston...’

In this conversation Rev. Dong Hwan Kim tells a fascinating story very simply, yet in a way that has tremendous implications for our understanding of life, faith and the church in a global city. Dong belongs to the Kingston-Upon-Thames Circuit, where he works as a ‘Circuit Resource’, rather than having responsibility for a specific church.

Tell us a bit about yourself...

My home country is South Korea. I have a B.Sc. degree from University in Seoul and I entered the Korean Methodist Seminary, also in Seoul, where I obtained a Masters degree in Theology. In 1994, I began to work in a church and four years later I was ordained. During those days, I joined a Bible Institute as a chief leader and published some books. My main ministerial concern in the same period was to develop a model of church life for a multi-national situation because so many immigrants were coming to my country. The Korean Methodist Church appointed and supported me to do that.

Why did you move to the UK to work?

In my working field, from time to time I felt my limitations. My bishop also wanted me to widen my experience and develop my ability both academically and practically. The UK, I believed, would be a good place to do that.

What is the Methodist Church in Korea like, and how is it different from the Methodist Church in the UK?

There are many differences between the two Methodist Churches. The differences, I think, mainly come from an obvious difference of structure. The Korean Methodist Church, which was planted by the UMC (American Conference). It is based on independent system for each church whilst British Methodism is ‘Connexional’. Due to this, the Korean Methodist churches are interested in their churches growth, but the British churches seem to be interested in a team work. In my view, the former church has a strong passion while the latter church has a stable structure of ministry. I think that if we can harmonise the two different points, they can both be healthier.

Why is there such a large Korean community in New Malden and nearby areas?

The reason is not clear. We are assuming that the first Korean shop set up there and the area has some good schools for children.

What are your goals as a minister working with that community? How does this fit in with the work of the Circuit?

Our Circuit leadership is keen to develop multi-cultural ministry in London. As we know, London is becoming metropolitan city with 30% of population of all residents from other cultures. Kingston is one of the most multi-national areas in London. In order to respond to this new situation, our team started to consider the ministry in 2004. We developed

some specific things in response: praise worship, international small groups, and international fellowships, etc.

What can Korean Methodists contribute to the life of the Methodist churches in London?

I think that there will be some important contributions that could be made by Korean Methodists. Among them, two examples can be given:

1. Evangelism: Korean Methodists are very devoted to sharing the Gospel with people. They are very well trained to do this.
2. Dynamic church life: they are used to accepting newcomers in church. They like to meet together and to do the Bible study and fellowship.

What are the biggest challenges you are facing in your work?

I am very happy with British Methodists. They are very kind and have warm hearts. But, in my view, they need to have an opened mind to new things. The world is changing very quickly but our churches are too slow to respond to it. As the owner of the Samsung Company said about 10 years ago, 'we have to change everything except our family'. Without meeting the challenge of change, our churches could die in 10 years.

Could you share a prayer that is special to you with us?

I wrote this prayer in a Korean Christian magazine.

The only words that I can say to you are 'Thou art enough!'

Before you, I become dumb,

I have a healthy mouth but I am able to say nothing.

Before you, I become blind,

I have bright sight but I am able to see nothing.

It is because Thou art enough for me.

Thou art enough for me. Amen

QUESTIONS:

- What are your reactions to Dong's story? What comments especially interest you?
- Dong identifies two different styles of church life, 'independent' and 'Connexional'. From what he says and from your own experience, what might be the strengths and weaknesses of each one?
- Dong pays a lovely tribute to Methodism in this country, but also offers a challenge. What new things might Methodists in London need our minds opened to? How far do you agree with Samsung's owner?
- The Korean Methodist community obviously has an enthusiasm for and commitment to evangelism that is stronger than we are often used to in British Methodism. How can we respond? What can we learn from such commitment and enthusiasm?
- What other ethnically distinct Christian communities are there near you? How might we best go about relating to them?

Bible Study: The passage Dong has chosen is **Acts 2:38 – 39**, the challenge that comes at the end of Peter's great Pentecost sermon. It reminds us of the worldwide context of the Gospel.

- What is the question Peter is answering, and what has provoked that question?

- In what ways do you think the message of repentance and forgiveness can be understood in our world today?
- From your own experience, what do you understand by 'the gift of the Holy Spirit'?
- How far do you think Peter's words represent a message for the people of London today?