

**The Racial Ethnic Presbyterians
Korean Americans**

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Research Services

A Ministry of the General Assembly Council
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street
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INTRODUCTION

The Korean Presbyterian panel (“the Panel”) is predominantly (98%) comprised of first generation immigrants. The proportion that are members of the 1.5 generation¹ is difficult to determine. Nonetheless, juxtaposing the age (Q-29)² and the length of residence in U.S. (Q-53) implies that very few, if any, members of the 1.5 generation are included in this panel. With only six second-generation Koreans (1 born in American Samoa, 2 in California, and 3 in New York state), these panel data denote, not the future, but rather the present state of first generation Korean immigrant Presbyterians³. The proportion of the first generation versus the 1.5 or second generation in Korean-American Presbyterian churches is difficult to estimate. Yet, it is not trivial. Hence, the Panel lacks information on a substantial portion of Korean-American Presbyterians. As a snapshot of the first generation immigrant Presbyterians, several points on the Korean panel are noteworthy.

First, most of them are the so-called “long-timers” whose length of residence in United States is more than ten years.⁴ What being a long-timer suggests in terms of church participation, views on the Bible, and theological orientation is difficult to define *a priori*. As immigrants’ time in the U.S. extends, their church participation may become less intensive and their theological orientation less conservative because of increased Americanization. At the same time, if the ethnic church is the only viable institution to satisfy their social group needs and their experience of Americanization is segmented, this may not be the case.

Second, the educational level of the Panel is much higher than that of Korean immigrants in general. Close to 70% of the Panel have finished college or gone on to graduate school. Among all Korean immigrant adults, the figure is about 50%. We do not think the discrepancy originates from fact that Presbyterians tend to be a highly educated group. About 70% of Korean immigrants are affiliated with Protestant churches, and only half of these are Presbyterians. In short, the sheer magnitude of numbers can easily invalidate this claim. A more probable cause of this discrepancy is the fact that this study is a mail survey. The same can be said regarding family income. That is, the median income in the Panel (\$40,000 - \$49,999 bracket, Q-63) seems higher than that of Korean Americans in general.

Third, an interesting observation can be made regarding the current place of living (Q-30). A great majority of Koreans across the U.S. live in large cities (population over 250,000) and/or in suburbs near large cities. On the other hand, only about 45% of those in the Panel do so. Even though there is no question in the questionnaire regarding their occupation, this point is a telltale sign that the Panel may include more professionals than among the Korean immigrant population in general. For example, about 42% of the Panel reside in small (under 50,000) or in medium (50,000-250,000) towns and their suburbs. Professionals are more likely than non-professionals to live in these types of communities. Possibly related to this is the rather low proportion of in the Panel who report they are self-employed.

¹ The term “1.5 generation” refers to those who were born in Korea and spent their formative years in the United States. Hybrids of the term also appear, such as 1.2 or 1.8 generation. Most scholars concur that the life experience of 1.5 generation Korean Americans can be distinguished from the second generation experience.

² The average (mean) age is 46 years old and the median age is 45 years.

³ The decline in the number of Korean immigrants began in the late 1980s and has accelerated in the 1990s. Moreover, the proportion of new arrivals declined drastically while the proportion of status adjusters increased significantly. South Korea is the only country among Asian immigrant sending countries with less immigrants than the allocated quota in recent years. Some even argue that the second wave of Korean immigration is, in a practical sense, over.

⁴ The mean value for the length of residence is 17.71 years, whereas the median is 18 years. Less than a quarter of those who were born abroad have lived in the United States less than 10 years.

Given these idiosyncrasies, one must exercise caution in interpreting the panel data. Nevertheless, it contains extremely rich details of the Korean immigrant Presbyterians' church life, their background, and their theological perspectives. We first report findings regarding Korean Presbyterians' congregational life under the heading of "Current Congregation." Discussion on background and contents of their beliefs comes next in the section, "Belief and Faith." A brief demographic analysis ends this report. In each sub-section, we present key findings in bullet points and in tables so that those who are pressed for time can capture the gist without reading the whole report.

Current Congregation

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Most members of the Korean Presbyterian Panel have been with their current congregation for a relatively short period of time. At the same time, the median years of being Presbyterian is 15 years.

A majority of the Panel belongs to congregations located some distance from their residences

The size of church membership varies a great deal.

Whether officially affiliated or not, Panel members participate at church as a family.

Tenure with Current Congregation

Even though the average (mean) tenure with one's current congregation is nine years, almost half (49%) of the Panel have been members of their current congregations for six years or less, and close to 30%, for less than three years.⁵ Such a short tenure is particularly notable in conjunction with the length of residence data (indicating an inclusion of a large number of long-timers). Study results attest to the fact that most Korean immigrants begin attending church from the start of their immigrant life. Results from two other questions can be contrasted to this short tenure with their current congregation, as well. Q-11 asks, "At any time in your life have you been a member of a religious group other than Presbyterian?" and Q-12, "How long have you been a Presbyterian?" Among the 62% of the Panel who checked "no" to Q-11, their average (median) years of being a Presbyterian (Q-12) is 26 years. Of the 38% who had belonged to other religious groups, the median is 10 years. The average length of time with one's current congregation is 15 years for the whole Panel.

As expected, average years with one's current congregation differs significantly among three ordination status groups: elders, deacons, and members. Elders include those who have been ordained as elders, whether currently serving on session or not. Deacons are those who have been ordained as deacons, whether currently active or inactive. Members are those who have never been ordained to the office of elder or deacon (Q-4a-d). Surprisingly, even among elders currently serving on session, one in ten persons (10%) have been with his/her current congregation for three years or less. This figure goes up to 18% among inactive elders. (See Table 1.)

⁵ In fact, the most frequently reported tenure at their current congregation (i.e., the mode) is three years. The median is seven years.

Table 1

How Long Have You Been a Member of Your Current Congregation?	Overall		Elders		Deacons		Members	
	freq.	%	freq.	%	freq.	%	freq.	%
3 years or less	196	29%	14	14%	27	14%	155	41%
4 - 10 years	261	39%	26	25%	82	42%	153	41%
11 - 15 years	87	13%	17	17%	40	20%	30	8%
16 years or more	130	19%	46	45%	47	24%	37	10%
Total	674	100%	103	101%	196	100%	375	100%

** Figures in percentages are rounded, thus, in some cases the total may exceed or be less than 100.

About one-third of the Panel (37%) indicate that they are “not sure,” “not very likely,” or “not at all likely” to be a part of their current congregation five years from now (Q-9). Elders or deacons are somewhat less likely to expect to leave their current congregation. These statistics hint at the fluid nature of Korean Presbyterian congregations and call for a closer scrutiny of their church life at a local congregation level. Glimpses of their current congregational life can be found in the factors some of those 37% indicate are “very important” and/or “important” reasons for leaving (Q-10), including “moving away from the community,” “spiritual needs unmet,” and “too much conflict.” (See Table 2.)

Table 2

Five Important Factors in the Likelihood of Leaving the One’s Current Congregation

	Very Important	Important
moving away from the area	72%	9%
services do not satisfy spiritual needs	39%	26%
too much conflict in the congregation	29%	23%
I don’t appreciate the pastor(s)	29%	17%
don’t like the program it currently offers	17%	23%

Note: These figures are based on the responses of those who answered “not very likely” or “not at all likely” to the question, “How likely is it that you will be a part of your current congregation five years from now?” (Q-9). 16% of the Panel answered as such, and another 21% answered “not sure” to the question.

Distance between Residence and Church

Korean ethnic churches are not neighborhood churches. Half of the Panel attend a church located at least 10 miles away from their residence (Q-2). One-tenth of the Panel is affiliated with a church 25 or more miles away from home. We suspect two causes for this phenomenon. First, Korean immigrants are residentially dispersed among suburbs. Second, interpersonal mingling with co-ethnics as differentiated from religious reasons is one of the important motives for joining an ethnic congregation. Again, it is not an unexpected phenomenon. Still, it does offer directions for logistics of church activities to minimize undue hardship and to maximize the benefit of church attendance.

Size of Congregation

Korean congregations of which Panelists are members vary dramatically in size from less than 20 to 6,000 members. Thus, even though the average size is 270 members, fully one-half of these congregations have less than 100 members. More than 80% of congregations have less than 300 members. In a way, this huge variation renders the classification and further analysis somewhat precarious.

Table 3
Approximate Number of Members in Congregations

Number of Members	Frequency	Percentage
100 or fewer	345	51%
101 - 300	235	35%
301 - 500	37	6%
501 – 999	35	5%
More than 1,000	22	3%
Total	674	100%

Church Participation as a Family

Korean Presbyterians' congregational life is a family affair. They arrive in America as a family, and naturally begin church life as a family. About 90% of the Panel are currently married (Q-34). In 90% of married couples, both husband and wife belong to the same congregation (Q-40). In the 64 cases where member and spouse are *not* affiliated with the same congregation, close to a quarter (22%) nonetheless attend the same congregation (Q-41). Although not asked in this survey, we suspect that elderly parents also attend the same congregation. What implications can we derive from this? First, Korean churches must provide programs for all ages in order to survive. For relatively small and resource-poor churches, this is not good news. Second, it is doubtful that specialized churches, whether program-wise or population-wise, can prosper a for long time. It is also entirely possible that as the number of immigrants continues to decline, the landscape of Korean churches may change, leaving a few dominant large churches.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND INVOLVEMENT

Panel members' church participation can be summed up as "*strong in-group commitment and out-group indifference,*" with the boundary of the in-group limited to one's current congregation.

Attendance rates in Sunday worship services are extremely high. Participation in activities at one's current congregation other than Sunday worship is still very intense.

Events and activities, even religious ones, taking place at locations other than one's current congregation draw very low participation. The contrast between the two—those at and those away from one's current congregation—is extraordinary.

Apart from church programs, almost zero volunteer time is given to community activities (outside of church).

Participation in Current Congregation

Attendance at Sunday Worship

Nearly all (95%) attend Sunday worship services “every week or nearly every week.” While it is true that self-reports have a tendency to overstate actual attendance, the figure of 95% is still impressive. This intense participation varies somewhat depending on whether one has been ordained as an elder or a deacon. For example, more than 97% of elders and deacons attend worship every week or nearly every week; 90% of those who are neither elders nor deacon attend that frequently. Yet, the difference is *not* significant. Factors such as age (Q-29), gender (Q-28), theological orientation (Q-17), tenure with the current congregation, size of congregation, and length of residence in the United States (Q-53) do not make a difference in worship attendance. Rather, most Korean immigrants attend Sunday worship every week or nearly every week. The most frequently-cited reason for missing Sunday worship at least once during the last year (Q-5) is vacation (56%), followed by illness (25%), and business travel (22%).

Participation in Other Church Activities

Between males and females there exists amazingly little difference in hours spent attending church events (Q-7a) and giving volunteer time at the church (Q-7b). About 55% of women and 53% of men report attending church events other than worship for more than six hours in the previous month. Likewise, no gender difference is found in the volunteer hours given to one’s current congregation in the previous month. Interestingly, a higher proportion of females (12%) than males (6%) report no participation in church events in the previous month. We believe it is because more males are ordained as elders. In fact, when separate analyses are run on elders, deacons, and members, differences in participation level are clear (see Table 4). Other factors such as age (except the youngest group) or church size are not related to time spent in church activities. Theological orientation (Q-17) makes a small difference in church activities, but none in volunteer time given to one’s current congregation.

Table 4
Who Participates More in Activities of Their Current Congregation?

		Elders	Deacons	Members
Hours attending church activities	0	1%	8%	11%
	1-5 hours	31%	6%	41%
	6 or more	68%	56%	47%
	Total	100%	100%	99%
Hours given in volunteer time	0	8%	16%	22%
	1-5 hours	47%	45%	47%
	6 or more	45%	40%	30%
	Total	100%	101%	99%

When asked to compare their current participation to that of two years ago (Q-8), 76% report that they currently participate either “more” or “about the same.” Less than a quarter (22%) report they currently participate less. This intense participation has been a hallmark of “in-group commitment.” Among Korean Presbyterians, the level of commitment to their “in-group” has not diminished. This in-group commitment itself is not a surprise. The unexpected finding is the boundary of their “in-group,” as seen in the next section.

Participation in Activities Away From One's Current Church

Participation in religious events

Overall participation in activities away from one's church is markedly lower when compared to activities at one's own church. Four in ten (42%) reported that they spent no hours, and 22%, 1-2 hours, attending religious events away from their home church in the previous month. As expected, whether one is an elder or deacon makes some difference. All other factors such as gender, theological orientation, region, and size of church are not related to the intensity of participation. The place of living (Q-30) becomes a marginally significant factor when we reclassify the variable into three categories: small, medium and large cities and suburbs, only. The direction is somewhat surprising—the smaller one's place of living is, the less participation reported in such activities. We expected the opposite. Korean Presbyterians in medium and/or small cities with a few Korean churches are likely to participate more in religious events at other churches, because of less overt competition among Korean churches and because of the necessity for greater cooperation with non-Korean churches. Or so we thought. In reality, Korean churches in all localities appear to claim all the available time of their members with activities in their own churches.

At first glance, age appears to be significant. Detailed analyses reveal, though, that it is the middle-age group (46-65 years of age) whose participation is increased in the 3-5 hours category which caused the significance. We believe it is linked to the fact that most elders are from this age group. In fact, when we exclude the effect of ordination (as elders and deacons), age becomes marginally significant at the lower end (i.e., less than 3 hours categories) only. Whichever way we analyzed, we found only very weak commitments to religious activities at places away from one's current congregation.

Volunteering in outside church community activities

Very little volunteer time is given toward community activities apart from church programs. About 70% report that they have given no time to such activities "to help the less fortunate" in the previous month; another 15% gave 1-2 hours. None of the factors—gender, place of living, region, size of church, and theological orientation—make a difference in the amount of time given to such activities. Age again appears to be significant at first, but, further analyses show that it is the middle-age group that reports an increased participation (in the 1-2 hours category) which renders age significant. An interesting observation here: it was the same age group (45-65 years old) which made age a significant factor in participation in activities at other churches and outside the church community. In religious events at other congregations, an increased participation of this age group occurs in the 3-5 hours category. Whereas, the increase occurs in the 1-2 hours category in volunteering for non-religious community programs. Clearly, the Panel is quite indifferent to community activities outside of their current congregations.

In sum, there exists a clear pecking order of participation intensities in the Korean Panel, in descending order, among Sunday worship services, events at their current congregation, volunteer time given to their own church, participating at religious events at other churches, and community activities. Activities at their own congregations elicit intense participation whereas activities at places away from their church draw markedly low participation, if at all. It is a typical "in-group commitment and out-group indifference," with a very limited boundary of the "in-group" at one's own congregation. Discussion on why such a stark difference in commitment intensities between in-group and out-group occurs is beyond the scope of this report. It is safe to describe, nonetheless, such a narrow confinement of the "in-group" as disheartening, given the fact that almost all of the Panel are the first generation immigrants, relatively small size of churches, and their short tenure and fluidity with the current congregation. Whether such a narrowing will continue or not remains to be seen. With a declining number of immigrants, though, an argument can be made for the beneficial effects of finding ways to expand the "in-group" boundary without lessening the commitment level.

CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP

92% of those who have been ordained as elders, whether currently active or inactive, are males. Only 8% of elders are less than 45 years old.

Ordination to the office of deacon exhibits no such strong dominance of males or those in a certain age group, except the youngest age group of 30 years old or younger.

All elders have also been ordained as deacons.

Leadership for chairs of congregational committees or task force comes mainly from elders, as expected. At the same time, the membership of such committees includes deacons and other members, as do Sunday school teachers and officers of men's, women's, or youth group.

Elder and Deacon Ordination

About 15% of the Panel members have been ordained as elders; close to one-third (33%) as deacons; and more than a half (56%) have never been ordained as elders or deacons. Close to two-thirds of elders are currently serving on session. In the case of deacons, the ratio is 77% currently serving to 23% not serving. All elders have also been ordained as deacons. There is a clear hierarchical sense of ordination. Moreover, a deacon or an elder position (especially the elder) is accepted as a "status" symbol rather than as a functional role. One indication in this regard can be found in the fact that the average household income differs among panelist holding different positions. The average elders' income is highest, and the average income of deacons is higher than that of members.

Being ordained as an elder is reserved almost exclusively for male members in Korean ethnic congregations. More than 90% of those ordained as elder, regardless of whether currently serving on session or not, are men. (See Table 5.) Another way to look at this is that only 2% of women members are ordained elders, whereas 29% of men are, this despite the fact that women slightly outnumber men in the Panel. In addition, the position of elder is also held primarily by older (at least 45 years of age) males. Being a female elder and/or a young elder are certainly rarities in Korean congregations. No similar discrepancy is found in terms of deacon ordination. Nonetheless, those in the youngest age group (30 years of age or younger) are less likely to be ordained deacons. Only 5% of this age group have been ordained as deacons.

Table 5
Who are Elders?

		Number	% of Elders	% of all Panelists
Gender	Female	8	8%	2%
	Male	93	92%	29%
	Total	101	100%	—
Age	44 years or younger	8	8%	3%
	45 years or older	93	92%	27%
	Total	101	100%	—

Other Leadership Roles

20% of elders chair a congregational committee or task force, while only 8% of deacons do so. To a slightly greater degree (48% of deacons vs. 17% of elders), deacons provides the bulk of the membership of such committees. Elders participate more than deacons as members of presbytery, synod, or General Assembly committees (20% of elders compared to 6% of deacons). A surprisingly low proportion of elders (3%) are church school teachers. Almost all Sunday school teachers are either deacons or members. This is a peculiarity in Korean congregations. Most Sunday schools are for children and are conducted in English. Thus, churches rely more on their younger members, who are less likely to be ordained as deacons or elders, to teach these classes.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

The median regular giving to one's current congregation during the previous year was:

Overall:	\$2,500 per household;	\$1,500 per person ⁶
For elders:	\$5,200 per household;	\$3,000 per person
For deacons:	\$3,000 per household;	\$1,750 per person
For members:	\$2,000 per household;	\$1,100 per person.

On average, about 83% of all money given to one's congregation went to the regular programs and mission through regular giving. There are no discernable differences among elders, deacons, and members in this respect.

Amounts of special giving to one's congregation (i.e., to a special capital campaign) vary a great deal, yet the range is much smaller than that for regular giving. Median household special giving to the congregation is \$500 per year. Median yearly giving to special appeals within Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is \$300.

Median giving to one's own congregation *and* special appeals within the PC(USA) are:

Overall:	\$4,080 per household
For elders:	\$7,950 per household
For deacons:	\$3,800 per household
For members:	\$3,500 per household.

Even though about three-quarters of the Panel gave some amount to religious causes outside of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and to non-religious causes, these amounts are much smaller in that more than half of the Panel gave \$100 or less in both categories.

Tentative calculations suggest that Panel members on average give close to 9% of their household income to their current congregation. Among elders, the percentage is close to 12%.

There are five categories of giving covered in the questionnaire: During the last year, (1) "How much money was given to one's own congregation in regular giving excluding special offerings?" (Q-65a - Regular giving), (2) "How much was given to one's own church in special giving such as capital campaigns and building funds?" (Q-65b - Special giving), (3) "How much was given to one's congregation in response to special appeals supported by the congregation or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?" (Q-65c - Special appeals), (4) "How much was given to all religious causes outside the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?" (Q-66 - Religious giving), and (5) "How much was given to non-religious causes?" (Q-67 - Non-religious giving).

⁶ To calculate individual (per person) giving, we divided household giving by number of family members with earned income (Q-61).

Predominance of Regular Giving

Regular giving to one's congregation makes up of the bulk of the Panel's giving. On average, about 70% of the total giving to PC(USA) causes (that is, 1, 2, and 3 above), was to regular missions and programs of the congregation (category 1 above). If only categories 1 and 2 are included, the ratio increases to over 80%. Amounts of regular giving vary a great deal, nonetheless, with about 90% of the Panel reporting regular giving to their current congregation of more than \$500, and more than 80% reporting giving more than \$1,000 during the previous year. Whether one is ordained as an elder or deacon makes a significant difference in the amount of regular giving. Interestingly, other factors such as income, gender, age, theological orientation, tenure at the current congregation, and participation in Sunday worship and other church activities become insignificant, once ordination status (Q-4a through Q-4d) is controlled. This fact gives credence to the idea that being ordained as an elder enhances one's "status" and certain reciprocity from the ordained is expected in Korean congregations.

Of all factors mentioned above, a lack of a significance relationship between amount given and participation at church activities and other religious events (Q-7a, Q-7b, and Q-7c) appears to be odd. In our view, the reasons for the insignificant results in this Panel are threefold: (1) there is very little variation within each ordination group, (2) the predominance of this ordination group variable, and (3) the overall intense participation at one's current congregation in the Panel.

Special Giving and Other Giving

Amounts of giving to special capital campaigns vary depending on whether the congregation has had a special campaign/project or not, and what type of special campaign it was. On the whole, amounts of special giving are much smaller than regular giving. To give a feel for the difference, the average (median) special giving is one-fifth of the average regular giving. Denomination-wide special appeals receive less support from Panelists than do special campaigns at the local congregation level. All three types of giving vary a great deal between elders and other panelists.

It is very difficult to calculate the percentage of household income given to churches because the income variable is categorical and the distribution within each category is not known. Nevertheless, some very cautious estimates are: 11-13% for elders, 7-8% for deacons, and 6-8% for members.

Contributions to religious causes outside of the denomination and to non-religious causes are minuscule compared to regular giving. Fully a quarter of the Panel report no giving (zero amount) to religious causes outside the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and close to 20% report no giving to non-religious causes.

In sum, the Korean Panel's regular giving is quite high overall and varies a great deal according to whether one is ordained as an elder or a deacon. Most of the Panel appear to take the "tithe" seriously. Compared to the Panel's giving to their own congregation, their giving to other causes whether within or outside of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is extremely low. It is again an indication of "strong in-group commitment and out-group indifference," with one's current congregation as the boundary of the "in-group." Apparently, Korean Presbyterians put money where their heart is.

Faith and Belief

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

More than half of the Panel (62%) have been Presbyterian throughout their immigrant life.

Slightly less than half (44%) were reared in the Presbyterian faith. Only about one-tenth (11%) report growing up without a religion affiliation. Including this group, more than one-third (37%) indicate that they were raised in a non-Christian family.

There are two slightly different questions in the survey regarding the Panel’s religious background: (1) “In what religious group were you raised?” (Q-15), and (2) “At any time in your life have you been a member of a religious group other than Presbyterian?” (Q-11). Being a Panel comprised almost entirely of immigrants, answers to these two questions can shed some light on Korean immigrants’ faith journey.

Close to two-thirds of the Panel (62%) have never belonged to a religious group other than Presbyterian. That proportion increases to 74% among elders and decreases to around 60% among non-elders. Of the 38% who have belonged to other religious groups, Methodist tops the list with 42%, and Baptist is second with 24%. Buddhism (16%) and Full Gospel (15%) are the next biggest groups. Still, even among this group (who have been members of other religious groups), the average years of being Presbyterian (Q-12) is 10 years, and the median length of residence in the U.S. (Q-53) is 18 years. Thus, it appears that a majority of the Panel has been Presbyterian for a considerable portion of their immigrant lives.

In contrast to this picture, about 37% of the Panel report that they were not reared in the Christian faith tradition: 19% grew up as Buddhists, 7% as Confucianists, and 11% with no religious affiliation. Interestingly, these percentages are nearly identical among elders, deacons, and members (as shown in Table 6). Presbyterian is the most often cited group among Christian faith traditions with 44%.

**Table 6
In What Religious Group Were You Raised?**

	Elders	Deacons	Members	All
Presbyterian	49%	40%	45%	44%
Roman Catholic	3%	5%	4%	4%
Buddhism	17%	20%	19%	19%
Confucianism	8%	8%	7%	7%
No religion	11%	11%	11%	11%
Others	12%	16%	10%	11%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Regarding their parents’ attendance at religious services, we believe that mothers’ behavior is more relevant than that of fathers. Here the picture is more evenly divided, that is, 42% had mothers who “never” attended religious services, and 43% had mothers who attended “every week” or “nearly every week.” These percentages are comparable for elders, deacons, and members. In short, the Korean Panel includes as many first generation believers as faith inheritors. We have no way of knowing how representative the Panel is in this regard.

How does this picture compare with Korean immigrants in general? Here are some statistics to consider. It is estimated that about 75-80% of Korean immigrants belong to Christian faith traditions including Roman Catholic⁷, and half of them were Christians before coming to the U.S. No estimates are made on what proportion of pre-immigration Christians are faith inheritors. Once in America, though, they usually attend ethnic churches from the beginning of their immigrant lives. About half of post-immigrant Protestants belong to a Presbyterian church.

Personal Beliefs

Views of the Bible

Not one person in the Korean Presbyterian Panel takes the most secular of five possible views of the Bible. Rather, 41% take the middle-of-the-road position. At the same time, 26% view the Bible as a guide without error for faith as well as secular matters. Another 18% view the Bible as the inerrant guide in faith and morals.

Prevailing perspectives on the Bible among Panel members are closer to a biblical inerrancy view than to a secular view. While no one takes the extreme secular view, more than a quarter (26%) subscribe to the extreme position, believing that the Bible is “without error not only in matters of faith, but also in secular matters.” At the same time, about two in five (41%) take the middle position. Table 8 displays the responses for this item for elders, deacons, and members separately and for respondents overall. This rather conservative view of the Bible is also manifested in self-reported theological orientation (Q-17), identification as a born-again Christian (Q-26), having had a conversion experience (Q-24), and other variables (e.g., Q-20, Q-21, Q-25k, Q-25l, & Q-25m). Ordination status is closely related to views of the Bible in that elders are the least secular, and members the most secular.

Table 7
View of the Bible

The Bible is the:	Elders	Deacons	Members	Overall
record of many people’s experience with God and is a useful guide for individual Christians in their search for basic moral and religious teachings.	2%	9%	18%	13%
Word of God and its stories and teaching provide a powerful motivation as we work toward God’s reign in the world.	33%	46%	40%	41%
inspired, authoritative Word of God that is without error in all that it says about faith and morals	23%	20%	17%	19%
inspired Word of God, without error not only in matters of faith, but also in historical, scientific, geographical, and other secular matters.	38%	25%	24%	26%
Total*	96%	100%	99%	99%

Note: * Due to a few respondents who made more than one response, totals do not add to 100% in some cases. Percentages here are rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁷ Roughly 10% of them are Roman Catholics.

Liberals and Conservatives: Self-identification and Content Analysis

44% of the Panel identify themselves as theologically “conservative,” one-third (33%) as “moderate,” and only a quarter (24%) as “liberal.”

Compared to moderates or liberals, more conservatives: are ordained elders, view the Bible as an inerrant guide for faith *and* secular matters, and identify themselves as “born-again” Christians.

Three-quarters of the Panel consider themselves to be “born-again” Christians. The same proportion report that they have had a conversion experience.

Interestingly, slightly more (82%) believe in the existence of a hell than believe in the existence of a heaven (75%).

Three questions probed Panelists’ subjective perceptions regarding their location in the theological spectrum of conservatives-liberals: “Which of the following terms best describes your current stand on *theological* issues?” (Q-17 with five categories of response), “Would you say you have had a conversion experience?” (Q-24), and “Do you consider yourself a ‘born-again’ Christian?” (Q-26).

Combining “very conservative” and “conservative” responses and “very liberal” and “liberal,” responses reveals that 44% identify themselves as “conservative,” 33% as “moderate,” and 23% as “liberal.” A variety of factors (besides the two other questions listed above) are expected to be related to this self-identification: gender, age, ordination status (position), frequency of Sunday worship attendance, participation level in church activities, amounts of religious and non-religious giving, views of the Bible, etc. Some of these factors turn out to be insignificant because their levels are uniformly high (e.g., participation in church events) or uniformly low (e.g., contribution to non-religious causes). Others show a more complicated picture. Here are a few. As seen in Table 8, elders and deacons are more likely than members to describe themselves as conservatives.

Table 8
Relationship Between Self-reported Stand on Theological Issues and Ordination Status

		Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Total
Overall		44%	33%	23%	100%
Position	Elders	58%	26%	16%	100%
	Deacons	47%	29%	24%	100%
	Members	37%	38%	25%	100%

At first glance, males appear to be more conservative than females. However, when the same analysis is run among non-elders only, the gender difference disappears.⁸ The results are the same for age and experience of conversion. “Born-again” Christian self-identification (Q-26) and view of the Bible (Q-19), on the other hand, remain significant even when the elder group is excluded. A detailed look at Q-26 reveals an interesting pattern (see Table 9).

⁸ In statistical jargon, “being an elder” is confounded with the gender difference. That is, while males are more conservative than females and elders are more conservative than members a much greater portion of males are elders (29% of males vs. 2% of females).

Table 9
Relationship Between Self-reported Stand on Theological Issues and
“Born-again” Christian Identification and Views of the Bible

		Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Born-again Christian?	No	5%	11%	16%
	Yes	83%	66%	67%
	Not sure	12%	23%	16%
	Total	100%	100%	99%
Views of the Bible	Useful guide-individual	6%	13%	24%
	Word of God-motivation	36%	42%	47%
	Inerrant guide-moral/faith	19%	23%	12%
	Inerrant guide-secular matters	36%	21%	16%
	Total	97%	99%	99%

To check whether theological self-identification is with substance, we made a composite scale (we call it the “conservatism scale”) using five questions in the questionnaire: (1) “Do you think there is a heaven?” (Q-20), (2) “Do you think there is a hell?” (Q-21), (3) “The Devil (Satan) really exists” (Q-25k), (4) “Jesus was born of a virgin” (Q-25l), and (5) “Jesus will return to the earth some day” (Q-25m). These five questions, in our view, are most closely tied to core beliefs of conservative Korean Christians. It is a four-point scale, with 1 being most conservative and 4 the least conservative. Next, we ran separate tests with two self-identification questions. Results indicate that these two questions are quite meaningful and the Panel’s theological outlook is extremely conservative.

Table 10
Conservatism Scale and Self-identification

Medium score: 1 (most conservative)

		Most Conservative	Conservative	Less Conservative	Least Conservative	Total
Overall	Frequency	558	72	12	1	643
	%	87%	11%	2%	**	100%
Theological Stance*	Conservative	90%	5%	1%	—	101%
	Moderate	88%	10%	2%	—	100%
	Liberal	70%	25%	4%	1%	100%
Born-again Christian?	Yes	95%	5%	**	—	100%
	Not sure	68%	29%	3%	—	100%
	No	52%	33%	13%	2%	100%

* Q 17: “Which of the following terms best describes your current stand on theological issues?”

** = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

— = no cases in this category

Other Beliefs : Individualism and Relativism

A person with a high individualism score attaches less importance to a church or any organized faith community to be “faithful.” Conversely, a less individualistic person (a person with a low score) conforms to the teachings of church.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Panel’s scores on the individualism scale are spread more evenly than expected, with 37% in the high-score group; 34%, the mid-score group; and 29% in the low-score group. Moreover, the fact that more persons are in the high-score group (the independent) than in the low-score group (the dependent) is an unexpected result.

Of factors such as gender, theological self-identification, educational level, ordination status group, born-again Christian identification, and age, only age is significantly related to individualism with an unclear direction. It appears that older Panelists are less dependent on the church and more individualistic—a perplexing result.

Views on the uniqueness of Christianity are captured in the “relativism” scores. Here the distribution is more skewed: 83% of the Panel believe that Christianity is unique—Christianity is not one of many religions, but *the* religion.

Because of such a lop-sided distribution, very few factors are found to be correlated to one’s view on the uniqueness of Christianity. Ordination status is marginally related, and theological self-identification and born again Christian identification are strongly related here. On the other hand, age is not a significant factor. Neither are gender, educational level, or length of residence in the United States.

Three questions sought Panelists’ views on the importance of the church in one’s faith: “An individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church” (Q-25), “In the realm of values, the final authority about good and bad is the individual” (Q-25f), and “Individuals should seek out religious truth for themselves and not conform to any church’s doctrines” (Q-25g). We created an index called the individualism score with these three variables. As shown in Table 11, overall scores are somewhat evenly distributed among high, medium, and low categories, and age is the only significant factor with a relationship in an unexpected direction. Younger age groups exhibit greater dependence; older panelists are more individualistic. We are not quite sure how to explain this result. Perhaps it is due to certain characteristics of a particular age cohort (especially 35-45 years old group in this Panel). One such characteristic might be the age of their children. It appears that this age group (35-45) has more pre-school age children (children under 6). Or perhaps it is because of the compounded effect of age and length of residence in U.S. The median length of residence for the 35-45 age group

is 15 years, implying that they had left Korea in their early 20s or 30s. Their immigrant life as young adults could have swayed them to rely more on church’s teachings in the realm of morality and faith.

Table 11
Distribution of the Individualism Score by Age

		<u>High</u> frequency %	<u>Medium</u> frequency %	<u>Low</u> frequency %	<u>Total</u> frequency %
Overall		235 37%	220 34%	186 29%	641 100%
Age	Under 34	38 30%	50 39%	41 32%	129 101%
	35 - 45	63 32%	64 33%	68 35%	195 100%
	46 - 60	76 37%	74 36%	56 27%	206 100%
	61 or older	51 55%	27 29%	15 16%	93 100%

Note: High scores on individualism imply a belief that the individual rather the church is the final authority on religious issues.

Four questions were used to develop a relativism score: “All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth” (Q-25b), “The only absolute Truth for humankind is in Jesus Christ” (Q-25d), “Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved” (Q-25e), and “All the great religions of the world are equally true and good” (Q-25i). A large majority (over 80%) of the Panel regards Christianity as the only religion for salvation (see Table12). Because of such a one-sided distribution, no factors other than born again Christian identification (Q-26) and theological self-identification (Q-17) are correlated with this index. In fact, the view that Christianity is the only way to salvation is the core of being conservative and “born-again” Christians. Thus, it is not a surprise that these two factors are correlated with the relativism score.

Table 12
Distribution of Relativism Score

<u>High</u> frequency %	<u>Medium</u> frequency %	<u>Low</u> frequency %	<u>Total</u> frequency %
17 3%	93 15%	520 82%	641 100%

Note: Low scores on relativism imply an adherence to the uniqueness of Christianity (i.e., Christianity is the only religion for salvation).

FAITH AND LIFESTYLE

There are three groups of questions that illuminate the faith perspective of Korean immigrant Presbyterians: qualities of a good Christian life, priorities for the congregation’s activities in the community, and judging the behaviors of others. The first two questions ask Panelists to rank various qualities as either “essential,” “most important,” “somewhat important” or “not at all important.” In the last question, the response categories are “admire,” “think it all right,” “mildly disapprove,” and “highly disapprove.”

Essential Qualities of a Good Christian Life

Three items—“studying the Bible regularly” (Q-22a), “spending time in prayer” (Q-22b), and “attending church regularly” (Q-22e)—received the highest “essential” ratings. More than six in ten rate these three as essential qualities of a good Christian life.

Two qualities—“seeking to bring others to faith in Christ” (Q-22f) and “practicing Christian values in work, home and school” (Q-22g)—received about 50% “essential” ratings.

“Taking care of those who are sick or needy” (Q-22d) was rated as “essential” by 27%, while “actively seeking social and economic justice” (Q-22c) received the lowest ranking with 19% rating it as “essential.”

Table 13 shows these qualities in three groupings based on the percent of respondents who rated each as “essential.” (When we add “very important” to “essential” the order does not change.) Reading too much into these rankings is risky. Nevertheless, a cautious conjecture can be advanced in terms of the range of social interaction implied in qualities within each grouping. For example, qualities in the top category have the smallest range of interaction, while qualities in the bottom category involve the widest range of interaction with society at large. As expected, a belief in the uniqueness of Christianity is correlated with qualities in the first category, but not with ones in the other two groups.

Table 13
Essential Qualities of a Good Christian Life

Qualities	% Rating as “Essential”
<p><u>Top</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. attending Church regularly 2. reading and studying the Bible regularly 3. spending time in prayer and meditation 	<p>67%</p> <p>63%</p> <p>60%</p>
<p><u>Middle</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. practicing Christian values in work, home and school 5. seeking to bring others to faith in Christ 	<p>50%</p> <p>47%</p>
<p><u>Bottom</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. taking care of those who are sick or needy 7. actively seeking social and economic justice 	<p>27%</p> <p>19%</p>

Priorities for the Congregation’s Activities

“Encouraging members to share their faith” (Q-23b) was rated as “essential” by the largest percentage of Panelists. The runner-up is “an active evangelism program, inviting the unchurched to attend” (Q-23e).

On the other hand, “supporting social action groups and ministries” (Q-23a) and “preparing people for a world to come, where the cares of this world will be absent” (Q-23f) were rated as “essential” by the smallest percentage of Panelists.

Those activities with evangelism elements are ranked high, while programs with social action components received low ranks (see Table 14). Gender, age and individualism scores are uncorrelated with the rankings. Ordination status group is marginally related to “an active evangelism program,” not to others. Patterns of correlation between one’s view on the uniqueness of Christianity and types of programs are clear cut. The more one believes in the uniqueness of Christianity, the less one views social actions (Q-23c) as “essential.” In the case of evangelism program (Q-23e), the direction is the opposite.

Table 14
Priority for the Congregation's Activities

Activities	% Rating as "Essential"
1. encouraging members to share their faith	43%
2. an active evangelism program, inviting the unchurched to attend	42%
3. helping members to resist the temptations of the world	34%
4. providing aid and services to people in need	32%
5. preparing people for a world to come, where the cares of this world will be absent	27%
6. supporting social action groups and ministries	25%

Judging Behaviors of Others

Panelists admire those who are "satisfied with her/his lot in life" (Q-27c) and those who "live her/his faith quietly" (Q-27h).

Those who: "live together in a heterosexual relationship outside of marriage" (Q-27d), are "openly, actively gay or lesbian" (Q-27f), or are "openly, actively gay or lesbian as part of a committed couple" (Q-27g) receive primarily "highly disapprove" ratings.

Moderate alcohol drinking (Q-27a) and people who are ambitious (Q-27b) received mixed reviews, while many disapprove of cheating on one's income tax (Q-27i).

One unmistakable impression from data regarding the fit between Christianity and various everyday behaviors is the strong adherence to the sanctity of heterosexual marriage. Homosexual partnerships or lifestyles received close to 90% "highly disapprove" ratings. Heterosexuals living together outside of marriage had 82% "highly disapprove" rating.

Table 15
Admiring and Highly Disapproving Characteristics

Characteristics/Behaviors	% Admiring	% Highly Disapprove
Admiring		
1. is satisfied with her/his lot in life	50%	
2. lives her/his faith quietly	46%	
Highly Disapproving		
1. is openly, actively gay or lesbian		90%
2. is openly, actively gay or lesbian as part of a committed couple		88%
3. lives together in a heterosexual relationship outside of marriage		82%
4. cheats on her/his income tax		63%

Social and Demographic Characteristic

GENDER AND AGE

Women slightly outnumber men in the Panel—344 (51%) to 325 (49%).

The youngest panelist is 14 years old; the oldest 90 years old. The average (median) age of the Panel is 45 years of age.

Females Panelists are somewhat younger than males (see Table 16). The average age among females is 44 years old, and among males it is 48 years of age.

Table 16
Age Distribution by Gender

	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
14 - 25 years	17	5%	12	4%	29	4%
26 - 35	66	20%	61	19%	127	19%
36 - 45	110	33%	68	21%	178	27%
46 - 55	80	24%	77	24%	157	24%
56 - 65	44	13%	64	20%	108	16%
66 or older	17	5%	37	12%	54	8%
Total	334	100%	319	100%	653	98%

Note: Due to 21 Panelists who did not report their age, the total is less than 674. Percentages are calculated based on reported cases only.

MARRIAGE AND CHILDBEARING

A majority of the Panel members (89%) are currently married. As expected, the percent who are married is slightly higher among males (91%) than among females (87%). Less than one in ten persons (8%) have never been married, and 91% of the currently-married persons report no previous marriages.

Among the ever-married persons (regardless of current marital status), 10% have been divorced, and 7% have experienced the death of spouse (have been widowed).

The median age at first marriage is 27 years (25 for females and 28 for males). About six in ten ever-married persons were between 25 and 29 years old at the time of their first marriage.

Three-quarters of the Panel have two or fewer children. Among female panelists, the average number of children increases slightly with age. For example, the median number of children is one in the 26-35 years old group, two among the 36-65 age group, and 2.5 among the oldest group (66 years old or older).

The age at which mothers first gave birth, on the other hand, decreases slightly with the age. The oldest group (66 or older) reports that they had their first child at the age of 24; among those 36 to 65 years old it increases to 26; and among those under 36 it increases again to 27.

Very few panelists (less than 3%) have ever adopted a child, and about 4% of the Panel report having at least one stepchild.

LIVING ARRANGEMENT AND HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

Around 7% of Korean Presbyterians live alone. Among those 56 years or older, about one in ten live alone. A gender difference is conspicuous and begins in the 46-55 age group where 8% of females and no males live alone. In the next older group (56-65) the ratios are 14% for females, and again no males. In the oldest group (66 or older), half of females and just 5% of males report living alone.

The predominant household type among Panel members is the nuclear family—a married couple with or without children (82%). Most couples have children (60%); 22% do not. Less than 3% are single-parent households.

The average number of children is two per household. Around one in five (19%) households that include a currently married couple have at least one child under the age of six. A quarter (26%) have at least one child under the age of 18.

About one in ten Korean American Presbyterians live in households with more than four persons. The median household size is 3 persons and the mean is 3 persons.

LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN U.S. AND MOBILITY

Almost all Korean Presbyterians (98%) are first-generation immigrants. The average (median) length of residence in the United States is 18 years overall; 17 years for females and 19 years among males. One-quarter (23%) have lived in U.S. for less than ten years; about one-third for 10 to 19 years. Close to half (44%) have lived in the U.S. for 20 years or more. In short, the Panel consists of many long-time, first-generation immigrants.

Panelists' length of residence in the U.S. is correlated with their age and thus, with ordination status. Since most Korean immigrants arrive as members of a family, the length of residence is not related to gender.

On the other hand, mobility within the United States appears to be quite limited. Close to half have lived in only one state. Another 30% have lived in only two states.

As expected, the length of residence and number of states members have lived in are somewhat correlated. Nevertheless, juxtaposing the facts that more than three-quarters report having lived in two or fewer states and close to one-half have lived in the U.S. for 20 years or more, reveals a limited mobility among the Panelists.

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL, EMPLOYMENT, AND INCOME

Close to two-thirds (64%) of the Panel have at least a college degree. Among those in the age group of 23-65 years old (which includes about 87% of the Panel), the rate increases slightly to 67%. The breakdown between genders is 77% among males and 56% among females in this age group (23-65 years of age). As mentioned before, these rates are higher than the rates among Korean immigrants in general.

The high educational level helps to explain the low unemployment rates. The unemployment rates among working-age panelists are less than 2% in each gender group.

Among working-age panelists, about one-third report being employed full-time (40% among males and 22% among females), another 30% are self-employed (38% among males and 23% among females), and about one in ten work part-time (Q-32).

As expected, the longer one stays in the United States, the more likely one is to work full-time and to be in self-employed. This trend is observed among both men and women and confirms previous studies on Korean immigrants' employment patterns.

Close to 80% of the full-time, part-time and self-employed panelists work 35 hours or more per week (Q-33). Weekly hours of work of spouses follow the same trend (Q-43).

The average number of income earners in members' households is two (Q-61), meaning usually that a husband and wife both work outside the home. The median household income (Q-62) is in the income bracket of \$50,000-\$59,999 among working age (23-65) panelists. The greatest source of their household income is earnings from employment (Q-63)—around 80% of the Panel reported that more than 75% of household income is “earnings from work.”

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

Over 60% of Panel members are homeowners (Q-51). Even among the working-age panelists, close to 30% are renters.

Less than a half (43%) live in large cities (population 250,000 or more) or suburbs near large cities (Q-30).

Among males, political party affiliation is evenly divided among Democrats, Independent, and Republicans (Q-55). (In fact, Republicans slightly outnumber Democrats.) Female panelists are somewhat more likely to Independents (Independent—40%, Democrats—35%, and Republicans—30%). Overall, Republicans are less common than Democrats among Panelists.

As Panelists' length of residence increases, the proportion of Independents declines while the percentage Democrats increases slightly. At the same time, the proportion of being the Republicans almost doubles among long-term residents.