

Recommendation

Presbytery of the Pacific overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to officially recognize the National Caucus of Korean Presbyterian Churches (NCKPC) as one of caucuses of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Rationale

A caucus formed by people of color provides a safe space for any group of people of color to work explicitly and intentionally on its shared experiences of internalized racism for healing, justice, and equity. As such, each community of color is to be acknowledged, organized, and assembled separately in recognition that every group's experiences and perceptions are unique to itself. Therefore, when any particular community of color appeals to the larger comprising body to form its caucus out of needs to be heard, to be recognized, and to express and advance its own concerns, such a plea ought to be ratified to preserve, affirm, and honor its own distinctive voice. For this reason, the 40,000-member strong Korean-speaking and culturally Korean PC(USA) community seeks to form its own caucus. The NCKPC has roughly 340 congregations* along with the three non-geographic presbyteries, and the size of its membership is comparable to that of the Black churches, the largest people of color group in the PC(USA). Although the Korean American congregations have long been vibrant, thriving, and contributing, they have been regrettably at times underrepresented and not fully heard within the PC(USA), hamstrung by language and cultural difficulty due to their relatively short immigrant history compared to other immigrant communities.

Presently, the PC(USA) officially recognizes five caucuses, representing five distinctive communities of color (Black, Asian, LatinX, Native American, and Middle Eastern), and representing Asian ethnic group is the National Asian Presbyterian Council (NAPC). Although the Koreans have been a part of the NAPC, the PMA has historically recognized the NCKPC as an independent caucus, and for the last two decades, the NCKPC has convened separate annual national gatherings. In addition, because of disproportionately extensive Korean constituents (estimated to account for more than 85 percent**) and because the Korean members outnumber all other caucuses combined, excluding the Black Americans, the NCKPC (National Caucus of Korean Presbyterian Churches) should be recognized as a distinctive official caucus. We should also note that the Korean language, culture, immigrant experience, and spirituality are distinctively different from those of the other Asian groups (as it is for each Asian group). Subsequently, there is an inherent imbalance when the overwhelming number of Korean members are in one caucus group, along with the members representing all the other Asians. Reflecting such imbalance, the Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries has had two associates, one for Asian Intercultural Congregational Support and another for the Korean Intercultural Congregational Support, in acknowledgment of the need to serve the two separately. Consequently, the Korean constituents desire to be represented in the PC(USA). Recognizing the NCKPC as an official caucus would be a significant step forward for the Korean Presbyterian community, while it maintains a partnership with the NAPC.

In recent years, the NCKPC has demonstrated more willingness to listen to constructive criticisms. Korean churches are now more conscious about participation in the life of our denomination. For instance, contributions to the Presbyterian Disaster Agency to support its work with Earthquake relief in Türkiye, Ukraine War and Maui Fire have significantly increased among the Korean churches, totaling nearly one million dollars during the Covid-19 pandemic. Women's ministry advocacy has been active in the past decade also. The number of Korean Churches with female ruling elders has increased by 15% in the first five years since the Women's Committee formed a decade ago, and

today, the Women's Leadership Committee (previously called Women's Committee) is actively working to increase women's participation in church leadership. This committee conducts surveys every five years, promoting leadership in all levels of ministries.

The Korean churches have contributed to the denomination's greater good in other areas. For example, many individuals who grew up and trained in Korean churches now serve beyond the Korean community. Many staff in our National Offices are Korean Americans, and some serve as the leaders in Mid-Council Ministry. We are also finding that many heads of staff at non-Korean-speaking congregations are Korean Americans. Four such individuals currently serve as head-of-staff in traditionally Anglo congregations in the greater Los Angeles area. The Korean churches rejoice that many of their next-generation servants are making an impact in the denomination, and we anticipate this trend to continue.

Established in 1972, the National Caucus of Korean Presbyterian Churches celebrated its Jubilee Year in 2022. On March 18th 1972, 19 members of UPC USA (United Presbyterian Church U.S.A.) started a fellowship in Northern California, and one month later, on April 26th, 18 members of PCUS (Presbyterian Church of the United States) formed the Korean Presbyterian Council of the PCUS in Atlanta, Georgia. One year after the historical unification of UPC USA (United Presbyterian Church U.S.A.) and PCUS (Presbyterian Church in the United States) on June 10th of 1983, two entities united to become the National Korean Presbyterian Council in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (what is now the National Caucus of Korean Presbyterian Churches) on May 25th of 1984. Thus, NCKPC's history goes back to the origin of PC(USA).

This is a well-established and highly functioning caucus, which only lacks recognition as an official caucus in our denomination. The NCKPC is the major organization in the PC(USA) that has the contact and the knowledge of all Korean-American congregations (defined as those whose membership comprises of 80 percent or more ethnically Korean) and works to promote their causes. It currently labors to support and protect the interests of diverse subgroups ranging from female clergy, men's & women's lay leadership, next generation Korean Americans, young pastors, and retired pastors.

Formally validating NCKPC as a caucus will only foster equity and enrich the diversity that the PC(USA) upholds and cherishes. The denomination's adoption could help Korean-American churches become healthier, build stronger relationships with other churches and councils, and engage more fully within the life of the denomination. The time to make NCKPC an official caucus has finally arrived.

Endnotes

* According to the 2023 Korean American Congregational Directory.

** This percentage is based on the 2018 Sessional Annual Statistical Report, the Korean American Congregational Directory, and the Asian American Congregational Directory, along with some additional analysis performed by the PC(USA) Research Services.