

## **Steve Hong**

### **Biographical Statement**

I was born in Seoul, South Korea in 1983, to a faithful Methodist mother, and a father who would be baptized with his infant son in 1984 as a member of Myeongdong United Methodist Church. Since, my father worked for Samsung's international business division, he was transferred to the its Canadian offices in Toronto, ON, Canada when I was 5/6 years old. From 1989 to 1994, I grew up as a Korean-Canadian boy, ice skating during school recess on a frozen baseball field during the winter and dipping my French fries in gravy. In 1994, my father accepted a position as the CEO of a company in Tijuana, Mexico, near the US/Mexico border. In 1994, I started my journey as a Korean-American, which I consider my primary cultural identity. I graduated from college (University of California, Irvine) in 2006, with a BA in sociology. After working in consumer research for a couple of years, I entered seminary in 2008 and graduated from Bethel Seminary of Bethel University (San Diego campus) with a M.Div. in 2011. As pastor of various ministries, I worked for my home church, Hanbit Church, from 2010 to 2014. After serving here, I served Wesley UMC as their youth and young adult minister for two years. From Jan of 2017 to the present, I have been serving the Korean Presbyterian Church of Columbus.

### **Statement of Call**

After college, I felt disillusioned about life. I had done what the world told me to do. I had done what my parents hoped I would do: I graduated from a good school (University of California, Irvine) and, as a result, I found a job that paid the bills. But, my heart wasn't satisfied. I had really lost who I was as a human being. Early on in my life I played competitive ice hockey with aspirations to earn a division 1 college scholarship. However, with the chance to play division 3 hockey at Lawrence University at the age of 20, I decided to continue my education at UC Irvine instead. I think this was the right decision. I don't think my body could have held up for 2-3 more years of competitive hockey. Yet, I think I've always been chasing the feeling I had playing hockey with my teammates. I had a mission in life. I had a purpose. And, even though we didn't always get along, I had a community that would put their bodies in harm's way if it meant protecting me or getting in the way of a puck going 80-90 mph to help out our goalie. A part of me has always been looking to join a movement with a purpose higher than the individual, worth giving my body to. Truly, if I had died playing hockey at the age of 17, I would have kissed the feet of God for such a wonderful life. I am so grateful to my parents for making it possible for me to play.

At UC Irvine, I earned a BA in sociology. Ever since my first year of taking college courses, sociology drew me in as a subject. I found nourishment in understanding the world from the sociological perspective. I loved taking classes on race, inequality, and all attempts to understand our society. But, the major also broke my heart numerous times. I discovered that sociology is truly a study of communal, systematic sin. Though, I'm not sure if I would have used those words to describe the world's brokenness back in college. I had actually left attending the church altogether after high school.

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### **Statement of Call continued**

After college, I started to attend the home church of my youth again. The main reason I went back was boredom. I found myself without a social life after moving back home. But, from this, God used my boredom and need for something to do, besides looking for jobs, to slowly woo me back to him. I started taking Bible classes and volunteering as a children's ministry worker. I went on mission trips. I started to read everything I could on religion, God, other faiths, Jesus, prayer, etc. During this spiritual renewal, I picked up a copy of *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. After reading this classic, I decided that I was in at the age of 24 and I was reborn.

After the economic crash in 2008, I was laid off from my job as a consumer researcher. After moving back in with the folks again, as I survived off unemployment checks, looking for a job, my senior pastor called me in and asked me if I had considered pastoral ministry as a career. I had not. Ever. I didn't think God would use someone like me to be a pastor. But, the idea took hold of me and didn't let go. I entered seminary in 2008. I loved seminary so much. I had no idea how mysteriously grand, good, merciful, wise God is and continues to be. During my second year of study (2010), I began to work professionally as a pastor. Currently, I am serving at Korean Presbyterian Church of Columbus as the Pastor to the English-Speaking Congregation (since Jan. of 2017) as I enter into my 8<sup>th</sup> year of professional ministry. Previously, I've had experience in ministry to people with special needs, middle school ministry, high school ministry, and children's ministry. I hope to continue to be amazed by God in ministry all my life.