

A TASTE OF SUCCESS

by: Patty Park



Pastor Kevin Haah knows a thing or two about success. More than 15 years ago, right out of Cornell Law School, he moved to California. Single, driving a convertible and living near the ocean, he worked for a prestigious law firm, climbing the ranks each year. Eventually he made partner, earning him the recognition he desired, not to mention a nice salary.

“When I was in law school, I found out how much money big firms paid and I wanted to succeed so badly,” Pastor Kevin recalls. “I couldn’t sleep at night. I wanted recognition, the sense that I had broken through the glass ceiling. This drove me for years.”

But there was something else that was driving at him for years – a call into ministry, which he had been feeling, and denying, since his high school days.

“At the time it just wasn’t a sacrifice I was willing to make,” he says. But as time went on, the calling only got stronger. And about seven years ago, he gave in. “God totally transformed my heart – now it felt like a sacrifice NOT to enter full-time ministry.” He gave up his law practice to pursue a Master in Divinity at Fuller Theological Seminary, and became part of the YNEM staff as associate pastor in 2004.

Now, Pastor Kevin is following another calling. To plant the New City Church of Los Angeles – a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic church in downtown Los Angeles.

“Shortly after I started to work as a pastor at YNEM, I received a call from a non-Korean stranger,” recalls Pastor Kevin. “He talked about the downtown residential boom and asked, ‘What is your church doing to reach out to the new residents in downtown?’” Pastor Kevin explained to him that we are a Korean-American church, but for some reason, what that stranger said struck a chord in his soul. He subscribed to a yahoo mailing list of all news articles that mentioned the words “downtown Los Angeles,” and began to follow every development in downtown. Then he and his wife, Grace, began praying – and his heart and conviction for downtown became even stronger.

As pastor of Love L.A., Pastor Kevin already spent much of his time reaching out to the broken and homeless on Skid Row. “I became more burdened that while we offered a successful worship service in Skid Row, we didn’t have Bible studies, small groups, or a community where people could grow and fellowship,” he says. And so he and Grace prayed more. They also spent several days of evaluation and assessment at the Church Planting Assessment Center, where they received the strongest possible recommendation to lead a multi-ethnic church plant.

In order to further confirm the call, Pastor Kevin talked to YNEM Senior Pastor Michael Lee about his vision.



Pastor Kevin, Grace, with their children (from L to R): Bennett, Kaetlyn and Eliana.

The core team of New City Church are prayed for at a recent commissioning service for Pastor Kevin and his family.

“It’s a fact that new church plants tend to be more evangelistic than established churches, so I was so excited when Pastor Kevin shared with me about his calling,” says Pastor Michael. “Pastor Kevin and Grace have a passion for the lost and they are unashamed of the gospel of Christ. My prayer for them, and for this new faith community they are beginning, is that God would bring people of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds into relationship to Himself.”

As Pastor Kevin and Grace prepare their family’s lives and hearts to begin this new chapter in their journey, Pastor Kevin admits that sure, there are questions.

“I admit that I sometimes wonder whether this is possible. There are not many churches out there that are both multi-ethnic and multi-socioeconomic. Will this work? Can we reach both groups? Can we support our family?”

But his definition of success is not the same as it used to be.

“Success is not defined by results, how the church does or how many people come,” says Pastor Kevin. “The definition of success is not about moving up in the world; it’s about obedience. I’ve realized that success just means figuring out what God wants me to do, and doing it. And we are sure that God wants us to do this, and so, we will do it.”



A SNAPSHOT OF DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

- Downtown Los Angeles is the fastest growing area in Los Angeles County. Its population will grow from approximately 18,000 in 1999-2000, to approximately 72,000 by 2011 – an almost 300% growth.
- The new residents of downtown are young, singles, multi-ethnic, affluent professionals. They are 53% Whites, 25% Asians (mostly Koreans), 10% Latinos, 5% Blacks, well educated, single (63%), work in downtown in a professional job, and mostly between 23 and 44 years old, with a median age of 31.
- The older residents of downtown include Skid Row. There are approximately 10,000 people living there, of which 75% are men, and about 500-1,000 live on the streets. About half of the Skid Row residents are Black and others are mixed—Whites, Latinos and some Asians. Most Skid Row residents live in low-income housing called Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Hotel or in missions or rehabilitation homes. It is important to realize that Skid Row is a community of people living there permanently, not just a transient community of people living on the street.

New City Church will be a multi-ethnic, economically diverse church, reaching out to the new and the old residents of downtown Los Angeles.