

Erina Kim-Eubanks**MEW Paper**

I never imagined myself becoming a pastor. As a child of Korean immigrants, growing up in an immigrant church, I had the privilege of experiencing church both as a place of spiritual growth, as well as a source of cultural refuge, shared mission, and community building. Yet, I never saw examples of women in leadership. The realities of patriarchy led me to believe that the most I could aspire to was a “pastor’s wife,” so despite having rich experiences in leading Bible study, small groups, and worship teams from a young age, I never imagined myself going into ministry.

My faith journey in college helped challenge these ideas while also cultivating my understanding of a holistic gospel. Most of the influential leaders in my campus ministry were brilliant women of color who stretched my conceptions of both what a leader looked like and how they led. I also had many formative experiences that brought me closer to Christ’s ministry of liberation to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized- from studying abroad in Ghana, to protesting genocide in Darfur, to working with survivors of trafficking in the slums of Manila, to serving as a literacy tutor at a juvenile detention facility. Through these experiences, I came to understand the story of God through the lens of shalom, encountering a God who not only cares about the condition of our souls, but also our physical, mental, and emotional flourishing.

After graduating, I spent 8 years in college ministry, accompanying young people as they grew an “adult” faith and (re)discovered Jesus in unexpected ways. Beyond that, I spent 5 years in various nonprofits, doing restorative justice work in schools and serving as a program director for prison ministry, before finally heeding the call to the local church. While I initially thought that church ministry would be too “boring” for me, I began to recognize the unique role churches can play in discipling people through every stage of life, and felt compelled by a vision of diverse, reconciled communities that wouldn’t exist except for Christ. As I sought a new imagination for church, God led me to First Pres Hayward, which taught me what it means to radically love your neighbors, and to Bethel Community, which has taught me about revitalization. Witnessing a church grow exponentially through a pandemic, a national racial reckoning, and political crisis has shown me that people are still hungry and the Spirit is still at work.

Through all these seasons of my journey, there are a few clear throughlines that undergird my motivation for ministry. To begin with, I believe in a God of unconditional love who longs for people to be whole, healthy, and authentically who they were created to be. Thus, I hope to be a minister who helps all people both discover and embrace the fullness of their identities as part of their unique reflection of God’s manifold wisdom in this world. Secondly, I believe that our faithfulness to Jesus must have impact on the present, material conditions of suffering, supremacy, and injustice in our world. Thus, I hope to activate the Church to not only preach but to also embody Christ’s call in Isaiah 61/Luke 4, and to help Christ followers reclaim their transformative potential as salt and light in this world. Finally, in this present era of church- a post-2016, covid-influenced, digitally driven generation of spiritual “nones”- I believe in the need for creativity and imagination in the Church, and am motivated to be a minister who holds the tensions of tradition and innovation while staying open to the Spirit moving in new and unexpected ways. The past 4.5 years of church revitalization at Bethel Community have shown me that it’s possible to have a diverse, thriving, intergenerational, multiethnic spiritual community, and I am motivated to continue exploring how to lead and sustain such churches.