

Models of Community-based Kingdom Mediation and Conflict Resolution

– Case Study and Analysis

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Field Organization Introduction: Action for Peace Through Prayer and Aid (APPA)

1) APPA's 10-Year Empirical Approach

APPA's initiative is to foster racial harmony between Korean-Americans and African-Americans, and end homelessness in D.C.'s poor communities; a second goal is to take an empirical approach toward determining the most effective programs in fostering racial harmony, and researching the role of mediation. The empirical approach was applied during 10 years from 1998 for research purposes. In particular, we used *Kimchi* as a tool of mediation for racial harmony. As part of the empirical study, we shared with the African-American community over 10 years an amount of *Kimchi* that would have fed 50,000 people. We used *Kimchi* as a cultural factor of mediation and as a Biblical factor by serving it during lunch after Sunday worship, with the intent to discover its impact in network dynamics between cultural and Biblical factors of mediation in multi-racial conflict resolution. More specifically, we served *Kimchi* to know its effect on Koinonia (spiritual fellowship) as a Biblical factor. When served with *Kimchi*, church members would respond to the dish they had never before been exposed to; *Kimchi*, in turn, became like a "social actor," drawing church members together and stimulating discussion among them. After 6 months, many people grew accustomed to *Kimchi*. Of course, there were some people that still disliked the taste, but the majority of those who had tried it liked it, even to the point of declaring of themselves "I am Kimchi Man." This was a stark change from my experience in 1998, when I first arrived in D.C. At that time, people from the community told me, "I hate Koreans," and also to leave the city if my only intent was to make money. Over the 10 years of serving them *Kimchi*, their attitude progressed from "I hate Koreans" to "I love *Kimchi*," then to "I love

Koreans,” and finally to “I love Jesus.” On hearing about the improvement in our relationship, the community dubbed my work “Kimchi Mediation” and “Kimchi Evangelism.” The data from the focus group interviews provides a more detailed account of this change.

2) Historical Background of Conflict Between Korean-Americans and African-Americans in D.C.

-- Perspectives and Stereotypes

Since the L.A. Riots of 1992, the racial tension between Korean-Americans and African-Americans in urban areas has become more prevalent. This is because at the time of the riots, many Korean-Americans operated small businesses in downtown L.A. And, even though Korean-American small business owners made up a minority of business owners with establishments in African-American communities, when compared with the tension between African-Americans and business owners of other races, the tension between Korean-Americans and African-Americans was the greatest.

Scholars and community leaders have offered differing opinions and explanations for the underlying causes of the racial tension between Korean-Americans and African-Americans:

1) The conflict between the two races is typical for a multicultural nation like the US. Due to many immigrants becoming economically stable and capable of investing in small businesses (i.e. liquor stores, markets, dry cleaners, etc.) in African-American communities. Still, in non-African-American communities, a greater proportion of Korean-Americans ran similar small businesses (i.e. law offices, restaurants, medical offices, etc.). In African-American communities, though, this generated a more noticeable concern for competition and taking over of current African-American businesses. According to former County of Los Angeles Human Relations Commissioner Larry Aubry: “It is easy to target somebody who is less than you are, or who threatens you. The targeting was there. I would say that targeting was there because those people perceive the Korean merchants as the enemy.”

In other words, any race of people that was considered an enemy would have been targeted. Drawing on lessons learned from the civil rights movement, Professor Alex Norman of University of California, Los Angeles, stated:

... the civil rights movement was not just a movement for Blacks, it was a movement for the entire country and I think to that extent Blacks have always been much broader in their concept of what equality ought to mean to people... It was wrong to target those stores because in the final analysis, not only did it harm the Korean merchants, but it also harmed the community. It's all a part of the hatred that we have to deal with.

2) Due to Korean merchants running businesses in crime-ridden neighborhoods, then naturally, there is a higher likelihood of their businesses to suffer from criminal activity. Many customers of Korean-run businesses (especially liquor stores) were drug addicts and criminals; as a result, these customers and business owners were more prone to get into arguments that quickly escalated into more dangerous conflicts. However, Korean businesses located in safer neighborhoods rarely experienced such crimes.

3) Cultural differences produce varying behaviors and attitudes that result in conflict. Many immigrants struggled with a language barrier, and were often unable to express themselves in a friendly manner. Also, many Korean-Americans were not familiar with African-American culture so they often misunderstood, for example, that their clients speaking loudly was not because they were angry. Professor Kye Young Park, University of California, Los Angeles, gives more examples:

Korean respondents most frequently mention the loudness, bad language, and shoplifting as inappropriate behavior demonstrated by Black patrons. By contrast, Black patrons most cite the negative attitudes of Korean merchants and employees, the feeling of being watched constantly, and the throwing money on the counter as inappropriate behaviors.

3) Historical Background of Washington, D.C.

APPA is an organization that promotes racial harmony and conflict-resolution. APPA has a peace-building program, which provides a cultural approach to multiracial conflict. The organization has served as a mediator while providing conflict resolution for communities through this program. Influenced by the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, APPA has been particularly successful in shrinking the conflict between Korean-Americans and African-Americans in the Washington D.C. area through its centers in Northwest D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland. Through its ministry of serving food to the homeless, APPA has served traditional Korean foods such as Kimchi to African-Americans; APPA has been engaged in this ministry of “Kimchi Reconciliation” for over ten years and has since served over 50,000 African-Americans.

Mediation and conflict resolution program are in serious need, especially in the “traditionally neglected” poor urban communities such as New York, Chicago, Washington D.C. and Baltimore. According to the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau data, the population of Washington D.C. totaled 588,292. The ethnic populations could be broken down into the following: black 55.2%, white 39.4%, Hispanic or Latino origin 8.3%, and Asian 3.4%. 17.12% of the total population fell into the low-income branches. High crime levels and racial conflicts have posed serious problems for the city. According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Report of *2007 Crime in the United States*, 181 people were killed in Washington D.C. Unlike in economically-developed urban cities where culture (e.g. theatre’ artists, musicians and writers) and ethnic diversity thrives,

poor urban communities foster a culture of crime, including violent crimes, such as murder and manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and property crime, such as burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft.

In this urban situation, churches and Christians have a role to play as mediators for planting the Kingdom culture and ethics for transforming communities. Therefore, for on-the ground community-based mediation and conflict resolution, the use of social capital is highly important. For this reason, I have worked to foster racial harmony and end homelessness in inner-city, Washington D.C. since 1988. Through these activities,

APPA attempted to promote social capital in the low-income Shaw-Howard neighborhood. But social capital-based community mediation can be easily navigated with non-authority-oriented mediations, collective participation-based cultural mediations like movement or campaign-styled initiatives, and too much grass root-level mediation approaches in poor urban context.

4) APPA's Sample Mediation Programs:

Kimchi Mediation and Reconciliation

Relations between Korean immigrants and African Americans have tensified with the growing presence of Korean-owned businesses in poor African American neighborhoods. Through the "Kimchi mediation and reconciliation program," APPA has served Kimchi with Korean foods such as bulgogi and steamed rice to African-Americans and other ethnic groups in D.C. When Kimchi was served for the first time to African-American participants, they said, "It is too hot." But now, they say "I love Kimchi" and "I love Koreans." So Kimchi has become a real tool of reconciliation (Feffer, 2003)."

In John H. Yoder's (1992: 37) words, "eating together already stands for values of hospitality and community-formation...Bread eaten together is economic sharing." We may then consider more traditional foods as important factors for fostering racial harmony.

Flower Mediation and Reconciliation,

The Day of D.C. Green Peace is an annual event in which community members and volunteers bring perennials and flowers such as lilies and azaleas to plant in impoverished areas. Then, foods provided by Korean-American and African-American communities are shared with the community-at-large. I first initiated this ten-year program in order to develop the community while fostering racial harmony. The program has proved to be an extremely effective verbal and non-verbal mediation tool for achieving the goals of racial conflict resolution. Due to the flower mediation program,

racial conflict and hatred between Koreans and other ethnic groups as well as the Korean-American and African-American communities have been significantly reduced in the APPA mission field area.

On-the-ground Community Mediation Service

As I mentioned in <Figure 2>, the goal of this program is to plant transformational or holistic mediation in multiracial-based conflict communities. It is based on a “three-cornered relation” approach towards transformational mediation and conflict resolution: diagnosis to investigate causes of conflicts, treatment (or mediation) to resolve conflicts, and the implementation of after-care programs to foster racial harmony and a better community.

Mediation Sample #1: Community-Based Racial Conflict and On-the-Ground Community-Based Mediation (Civilian-Centered Involvement)

A conflict between a Korean-American store owner and an African-American customer took place, resulting in verbal and physical violence in ~~2006 in~~ downtown D.C. in 2006. It escalated into a serious racial conflict. In response, H. Street Community Development, Washington Inter-faith Council, APPA, and the Washington, D.C. Mayor Office organized a mediation committee. Fortunately, we reached a successful outcome through three mediation meetings, but to continually improve community relations, we met two more times. We decided to hold a candlelight prayer vigil and a block party sponsored by APPA several times a year to facilitate the harmony of the relationships between both communities. We had the mediation-based community programs for two years (during Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas). As of 2009, there have been no more racially-motivated conflicts in D.C. involving Korean-Americans and African-Americans.

Multiracial Community-Based Mediation Rituals

Rituals of mediation are extremely helpful tools for fostering racial harmony and building a better community. Rituals are also the most effective mediation tools for

treating and caring for pains and trials caused by racial conflict especially in multiracial and multicultural communities. Racial harmony-based community programs as well as community-based worship and candle prayers are important mediation tools. APPA has operated several multiracial-based community programs for mediation such as candlelight memorial prayers for victims of conflict, art contests for children towards racial harmony, walk-a-thons for racial harmony and fundraising, and block parties for community fellowship. In the case of an art contest, we have acted in cooperation with the public schools and private art academies in the community. To instill the importance of racial harmony in children, through after-school programs, for example, is the most effective investment for preventing racial conflicts.

Grassroots Worship for Mediation and Reconciliation

APPA's unique worship program for the homeless is held at the House of Peace every Sunday. Forty to fifty multiracial homeless and low-income people gather weekly to worship God. This church is a church "for the homeless, by the homeless, and of the homeless." APPA has eight ordained deacons and deaconess, who were themselves once homeless. APPA has provided luncheon meals after the worship services to foster racial harmony and fellowship and has offered other worship programs such as prayer meetings, revivals, seminars, and so on.

Pentecostal prayer and worship services for the poor, especially through joint programs with healing ministry-oriented African-American or Asian-American churches, have also been effective in promoting racial harmony and developing a conflict resolution. We have also strived to apply healing ministry-based mediation and conflict resolution approaches from foreign mission fields, such as in the northern Philippines where the "Kankana-eyes people" whose families and entire communities have opened their hearts to Korean missionaries and turned to Christ as a result of divine healing (Ma, 2003).

Legal Services for the Poor

APPA provides a monthly Christian legal aid clinic, comprised of multiracial lawyers and hosted by Koreans. These clinics offer legal as well as spiritual counseling and advice for Washington D.C.'s low-income and homeless community members. The services allow people to pray, share meals, fellowship, and meet with attorneys and other professionals for in-take interviews as well as to participate in follow-up consultations, if necessary. The legal aid service is co-sponsored by the D.C. Christian Legal Aid Program of the Christian Legal Society, which consists of Christian lawyers. The legal aid program's office is open the second Saturday of every month with three to five lawyers and law school students available for counseling each time.

With Koreans hosting and supporting such services, the community can associate positive perceptions towards Koreans and thus, minimize racial conflict between the two races.

For this program, it would be helpful for younger immigrant generations such as Korean-Americans, Chinese-Americans and Mexican-Americans in the future to participate in providing free legal services to the poor in hopes of promoting racial harmony. Currently, the people involved have been available and enthusiastic about being a part of APPA's work and ministry for urban transformation.

After-School Mediation and Reconciliation

After-school community programs are a good tool in preventing racial conflict. Main problems of children in the inner-city are the lack of parental figures as well as the necessary financial and educational support. An effective approach for dealing with these issues has been to organize teachers from multiracial backgrounds and to recruit diverse students to build a multicultural community. In addition, we can nourish a sense of the importance of a safe community in the students and children can help to eliminate the misunderstanding and misperceptions of Koreans to their parents. By positively affecting the community, children can form positive perceptions of Koreans and they, in turn, can instill positive perceptions of Koreans in their parents or break any negative attitudes that their parents hold against Koreans. APPA has worked towards the goal of finding an

effective conflict resolution between the Korean and African communities through running after school programs.

For the continued success of educating the community, the contributions from young Korean-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans who can volunteer as teachers, mentors and tutors will be helpful.

Multiracial Advocacy: Korean Hostages in Afghanistan

When 23 South Korean young Christians were captured at gunpoint from a bus in Ghazni province on July 19, 2007 (with one of the leaders and one of the members being killed by Taliban terrorists), APPA immediately advocated for the United States' involvement in negotiations with the Taliban. APPA held a community meeting and made an appeal to the White House, the U.S. Congress and the United Nations.

Interfaith Islamic, Jewish and Protestant community leaders and African Americans within the community participated in the advocacy effort. Different races came together for one cause. With the support of many people from different backgrounds and races, advocacy can be a cultural factor in influencing racial harmony. Moreover, with the collective power that arise from the coming together of multiracial people, social injustice can be reduced. As in Jim Wallis' emphasis--"the best role for faith-based initiatives in our community is not only in the provision of social service," but also "in the shaping of public policy" to transform social justice (Wallis, 2006: 231).

APPA is seeking to continue to develop such advocacy programs.

Life-Evangelism Mediation

Life evangelism refers to the life of 'being conformed to Christ' and 'of participating in Christ' through dramatic 'transforming initiative.' It is a transformational action navigated through 'apocalyptic' and 'eschatological' self-fermentation by God's 'participative grace' (or 'costly grace' called by Dietrich Bonhoeffer). According to Kenneth Leech, spiritual life in a postmodern urban context refers to a "life-giving movement, a life driven and energized by God (Leech, 1992: 208)." For this reason, life

evangelism is based on the concept of “welcoming strangers” with a spirit of hospitality, which will eventually transform our broken multiracial communities (Wallis, 2008: 138-141). By engaging in life evangelism, not only through participating in a program, but instilling life evangelism as a lifestyle, APPA has been able to transform the community.

Street Evangelism Mediation and Reconciliation

APPA not only serves meals, but works as a community for the homeless. The organization encourages its volunteers to maintain friendships with the homeless through its street evangelism program. The frequent meetings give APPA direct access to the needs of the homeless and serve as opportunities for providing and resolving these needs. Through APPA’s Summer/Winter Short-Term Missions Program, over 300 teenagers from across the United States participate in street evangelism. Through a six-hour “street experience,” participants are able to be in the shoes of a homeless person, which allows them to better sympathize with the homeless. This experience includes fasting (no eating or drinking), no talking, sharing benches with the homeless, and meditating on their identities, the person of Jesus Christ and his disciples, and their own thirst, hunger, and loneliness.

In Gustavo Gutierrez’s words, “contemplation (in the full sense of the term as a form of prayer) and practice together make up a first act; theologizing is a second act (Gutierrez, 1987:p.xiii).” To reach a more in-depth understanding, Gutierrez used terms of “*contemplate aliis tradere* (to transmit to others the fruits of contemplation)” and “*in actione contemplativus* (contemplative in action)” (Gutierrez, 1974: 7). Thus, it is very important for us to follow Jesus’ teaching of urban transformational mission in Luke 14:21; “...Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.”

Medical Service for Mediation and Reconciliation

APPA’s medical program consists of Korean-American and Filipino-American

medical volunteers. APPA's medical clinic program was established to provide quick access to primary care for people who are homeless and without health care services. The clinic has a Filipino medical doctor, two Korean medical doctors, a Korean nurse practitioner and a Korean pharmacist and opens every Sunday after worship at the APPA center. Outreach services are held in neighboring cities three times a year. The main services of the APPA clinic include providing ongoing-based primary care, prescriptions, referrals, and spiritual counseling.

The APPA clinic program has also played a positive role in diminishing the escalation of conflict between Korean- and African-Americans in Washington D.C.