

“Crossing boundaries”

by Emily Enders Odom

COLUMBUS – The Rev. Paul Huh’s appearance in Columbus as a commissioner at the 214th General Assembly providentially coincided with the brand new resource he helped to edit. “Come, Let Us Worship,” the Korean-English Presbyterian Hymnal and Service Book, like Huh, is making its debut here.

“I didn’t realize that when I served as a theological student advisory delegate from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1990,” said Huh, “that it would bring me on a new journey for twelve years to come back a second time to General Assembly bringing a new hymnal.”

What Huh also didn’t realize was that his hymnal committee colleague, the Rev. Seung Nam Kim, who composed the Korean psalter for the new resource, would also be present as a commissioner. Huh and Kim, a musician and former opera conductor, met eight years ago at the first “Korean Conference on Worship & Music” in Anaheim, Ca.

A joint project of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Methodist Church, the bilingual hymnal was published by Geneva Press, Louisville, Ky.

Huh recalled his first encounter with Melva Costen, editor of The Presbyterian Hymnal (1990), and her explanation of why so many racial ethnic hymns were included in the 1990 edition. “Her answer,” Huh said, “was that it was a gift from the racial ethnic churches to the larger church, that we may be able to share our resources from all of our diverse backgrounds to come as one as we worship together.”

Costen’s words echo Huh’s own commitment to “crossing boundaries” in his life, faith and ministry.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Huh crossed his first boundary when he came to the United States in 1976. Introduced to the Presbyterian Church through his uncle, a pastor, Huh was baptized at the Korean United Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pa., that same year.

Educated at Princeton Theological Seminary, Huh served entirely Korean congregations upon ordination. He recently crossed another significant boundary when he received a call four years ago to serve the Bethany Presbyterian Church, an Anglo congregation in Bloomfield, N.J.

Even that breakthrough pales, however, beside the vision that has come to fruition for him at this year’s assembly. The action that began with an overture from the Hanmi Presbytery to the 207th General Assembly (1995) to develop a Korean-English hymnal and service book constitutes the crossing of the greatest boundary of all: the reclaiming by and for the church of a precious gift from Korea.

“In Korean church history,” Kim explained, “the Korean musical tradition was cut off by Western music.”

Huh agreed. “This resource is a breakthrough for Korean congregations,” he said, “an opportunity to claim their heritage in worship.”