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Jung Kyung Seo serves as the pastor of Korean Baptist Church, Pensacola a mission of Olive Baptist Church.

# Asian churches let believers worship in their native tongue

Some Christians are starting churches in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties to provide worship and Bible study in languages such as **Korean**, Vietnamese, Japanese and Chinese

By Alice Crann ♦ News Journal staff writer



The **Korean Baptist** Church of Pensacola is one of four churches in the area offering native-language services.

The **Korean** women chatter among themselves, in their native tongue, as they deliver potluck for the meal to follow the Sunday worship service.

Casserole dishes hold dried seaweed, marinated garlic, white rice, roast chicken and spicy, chilled vegetables and salads. Chopsticks fill a jug.

Menfolk — a mix of whites, blacks and Asians — enjoy coffee, cookies and conversation at a table in Fellowship Hall of the **Korean Baptist** Church of Pensacola. Children run between chairs and parents' legs, laughing and playing.

When the Rev. **Jung Kyung Seo** arrives, all head to the sanctuary where Seo leads his 80-member congregation in prayer and song in **Korean**. Miyoung Edmonds, an interpreter, translates Seo's words into English. **Non-Korean** speaking visitors use headphones to follow along.

"This church is all about sharing a togetherness found among people of the same culture," says David Twombly, 67, who has attended the **Korean Baptist** church with his wife, Sul Ok, 54, since the church's inception 13 years ago.

As thousands of Christians head to larger, mainstream churches in Northwest Florida, hundreds of Asian people and their families attend small churches that took years to create. Or they worship separately in rooms within large "mother churches" until they have the membership and funds to sustain their own churches.

The mentoring role played by larger churches often is part of their mission.

"We are trying to communicate the message of the gospel in their own language. Our goal is to get them to be self-supporting and become a church on their own," says the Rev. Ted Traylor, pastor of the 7,100-member **Olive Baptist** Church, which

helped establish the **Korean Baptist** church.

"The language barrier, as well as cultural differences, is the basic reason that they have their own church."

According to the most recent U.S. Census data, about 6,000 people of Asian descent live in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties — an area where Asian Christians are starting their own churches to provide worship and Bible study in their native languages, such as **Korean**, Vietnamese, Japanese and Chinese.

Mother churches, which come in various denominations, assist financially and provide the materials needed in getting mission churches going.

Members at the majority of the Asian mission churches are first-generation United States residents who either immigrated in the 1960s and 1970s and cannot speak English, women who married



## Language barrier

The practical aspect of foreign-language services is important to many immigrants. After all, the specialized meanings of religious words as well as a pastor's diction and sermon jokes may baffle rather than enlighten non-native English speakers.

Sul Ok Twombly, 50, attends the 75-member Korean Baptist Church of Pensacola, a mission of Olive Baptist Church. Every Sunday, the Rev. Jung Kyung Seo delivers a Korean sermon, the choir sings Korean hymns and the congregation reads from a Korean-and-English Bible.

"A couple of times I went to Olive Baptist but I did not quite understand. Maybe half I get, half I miss," she said. "Even in Korean, some words I don't quite understand. But I understand 99 percent."

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