

CHURCH PLANT PLAN OF NEW CITY CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES



Lead Planters
Kevin and Grace Haah

Executive Summary

After twelve years of practicing law, God called me (Kevin) into full-time pastoral ministry at Young Nak English Ministry (YNEM). After learning and growing so much at Young Nak, with the support and encouragement of its leadership, Grace and I are called by God to plant a multi-ethnic, economically diverse church in downtown Los Angeles, reaching out to both the new and the old residents of downtown.

Downtown Los Angeles is the fastest growing area in Los Angeles County. Its population is expected to grow from approximately 18,000 in 1999-2000 to almost 50,000 by about 2010 and to over 70,000 if you count the projects in the pipeline. The new residents of downtown are young, singles, multi-ethnic, affluent professionals. The older residents of downtown are poor residents of Skid Row. There are very few churches intentionally trying to reach out to these new residents, and no church trying to reach out to both. I have lived in downtown working as a lawyer and I have worked in Skid Row as a pastor of Love LA, a Skid Row ministry. I believe that God has been preparing me for the ministry of leading a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic church in downtown Los Angeles.

Our vision is to plant a multi-ethnic, economically diverse church that is:

- passionate about reaching the unchurched for Jesus,
- passionate about the power and centrality of the gospel,
- passionate about discipleship and inside-out transformation,
- passionate about loving one another in community, and
- passionate about serving and transforming the city, and through it, transform the world.

We are seeking to “soft” launch on Easter, March 23, 2008. As such, I will be leaving YNEM by the end of January, 2008, and we will start our worship services in February, 2008. Currently, I am in the process of developing a church plant core team, and we have been meeting regularly for prayer.

Our strategy is a two-step launch strategy. We will put together a multi-ethnic and economically diverse core team of about 20-30 people and “soft” launch the church on Easter Sunday. After we develop the core team to about 50 and build systems and ministries of the church, we will “hard” launch the church through a Grand Opening around Fall, 2008. Our goal is to engage in massive outreach, including a well orchestrated direct mail campaign to at least 20,000 households over several weeks to get people to come out to the Grand Opening.

I. Introduction: Journey to the Call

Shortly after I started to work as a pastor at YNEM, I received a telephone call from a stranger. I think the call was routed to me by the church office because I was the only one available. He was not Korean, but he called us because we are a large church located near downtown Los Angeles. He talked about the rapidly growing population of downtown, and asked me: "What is your church doing to reach out to the new residents of downtown?" I politely explained to him that we are a Korean American church, but his question stuck with me. It struck a chord in my soul. I subscribed to a yahoo mailing list of all news articles that mention the word "downtown Los Angeles." I have been following all of the unprecedented developments occurring in downtown for the last 3 years.

A few months later, as I was serving as a pastor of Love LA (a Skid Row parking lot worship service), I became burdened by the fact that we have created a successful worship service in Skid Row (in downtown), but one without a community where the congregants can grow and fellowship. Although I experienced God's presence and power at Love LA, I also felt like we created an excuse for some of them not to go to a church because Love LA worships like a church and even takes offering like a church, but it does not offer Bible studies, small groups, recovery groups, or discipleship. There is minimal pastoral care.

Combining the two ideas, I remember saying to a group of Love LA volunteers: what if we planted a multi-ethnic and multi-socioeconomic church in downtown?

For a long time, that idea simmered in my head. Grace (my wife) and I continued to pray about this. But, I did not think that it was wise for us to pursue this because it was so close to the Young Nak campus and I felt unsure about whether I was qualified to do so.

During the senior pastor search process at YNEM, God gave me an opportunity to develop as a pastor at a lightning speed. I had the privilege of preaching frequently and growing as a preacher and pastor. During the transition, Grace and I continued to pray for God's guidance and God made it clear that He wants us to plant a multi-ethnic church. I still had that desire to do so in downtown, but I needed clarity regarding the location and confirmation regarding qualification.

After Pastor Michael Lee (new YNEM senior pastor) came, Grace and I went to Church Planting Assessment Center (CPAC), a non-denominational assessment center for church planters. We spent several days of grueling evaluation and assessment to determine whether we are fit to be church planters. At the end of the process, CPAC gave us the strongest possible recommendation to lead a multi-ethnic church plant. As we were coming back from CPAC, Grace and I started to openly vision a church in downtown. As we talked, tears flowed and we felt that sense that God was calling us to plant a multi-ethnic church in downtown. In order to confirm the call, we had to talk to Pastor Michael Lee.

When I shared the vision with Pastor Michael, he became more excited about the vision than I was. We started to talk about what this church might look like and how to do it. Since he had been a church planter himself, he knew both the rewards and the difficulties of being a church planter. We decided that I should compile some demographic data and share it with the session.

When I compiled the demographic data, it became very compelling. Downtown's population is projected to grow from 18,000 in the year 1999-2000 to 72,000 in 2010-2011, and there is very little action going on in terms of churches in downtown. *See*, Section III below for more detailed demographic information.

I submitted the data and the vision, and the session unanimously supported the vision, and decided to support approximately 50% of the funds needed for the church plant for the first year.

Since the session's approval, a church plant group has started to meet to pray regularly.

II. The Church Planter Profile: Kevin Haah



I was born in 1965. I grew up in San Jose, California, in a Latino neighborhood, and later in a more mixed but predominately white neighborhood. Although I grew up in a Christian home (my father being a Presbyterian elder), I became a Christian through a Baptist church retreat during high school. I was disciplined by my youth pastor, and it is he who first challenged me to consider becoming a pastor. God called me into ministry in many ways, some of which

were supernatural, but I was very reluctant to go into full time ministry.

When I was graduating from college at *UC Davis* with a BA in Political Science, I felt that the world of opportunity was open to me, having received decent grades and even served as the student body president. So, instead of going to seminary, after a short stint at Arthur Anderson and Co., I went to *Cornell Law School* in New York.

When I graduated from Cornell, I decided to work for a large law firm in Los Angeles, practicing corporate business reorganization law. I worked hard as a lawyer and served diligently at church. I served as a deacon, then an ordained deacon, and later as elder at YNEM. Interestingly, it was after my law firm admitted me into the ranks of partnership that God called me to into full time ministry again. The process of discerning

God's will involved a lot of prayer with Grace hearing the Spirit of God, an evaluation of my character and spiritual gifts and of whether I could truly serve God more effectively as a pastor rather than as an elder, the wisdom of mature Christians in our family and church, a deep look at the desires of my heart, and God's providence. After spending a period of intense prayer, we knew that God was calling us to go into full time ministry and the only thing we had to do was to obey and follow Him. When I considered full time ministry after college, it felt so much like a sacrifice I didn't want to make. When Grace and I made the decision in 2001, God had completely changed my heart. It felt like a sacrifice not to enter into full time ministry.

Since then, I finished my M.Div. at *Fuller Theological Seminary* in 2005 and became ordained as a minister at Korean Presbyterian Church in America in 2006. I have been serving as a Pastor for YNEM serving in Love Ministries, singles ministry, membership ministry, evangelism ministry, and preaching ministry.



My Family (from left to right): Bennett (3), Kevin, Kaetlyn (6), Grace and Eliana (3)

III. Why Downtown Los Angeles?

A. Population Growth of Downtown Los Angeles

	Housing Units	Total Housing Units	<i>Population</i>	Change compared to 1999 in percentage	Change compared to 1999 in absolute number of people
Existing as of 1999	11,688	11,688	18,700		
Existing as of 2007	9,256	20,944	33,510	79%	14,810
Under Construction or Permitted	9,311	30,255	48,408	159%	29,704
In Pipeline	14,741	44,996	<u>71,994</u>	285%	53,294

Conclusion: Downtown Los Angeles is one of the fastest growing areas in the Greater Los Angeles area.¹

B. Who lives in Downtown?

Downtown is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-socioeconomic community. Most of the new residents of downtown fit into the following profile: 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.



¹ Based on data provided by Downtown Business Improvement District

The older residents of downtown include Skid Row. There are approximately 8,000 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.

C. English Speaking Churches in Downtown

My survey of churches show that there are two Methodist churches which are small and composed mostly of elderly people, a couple of churches in Skid Row, a small Korean American church, a new church plant that is mostly Korean American although it is becoming more multi-ethnic, and one church mostly composed of younger people meeting at a night club. Considering the number of people living in downtown and their demographics, only one church is trying to reach out to the new residents in downtown, and there is no church reaching out to create a multi-ethnic economically diverse church.

D. My Background

God has been providentially preparing me to plant a multi-ethnic, economically diverse church in downtown Los Angeles by putting me in the context of both groups of people for many years: (1) I have worked as an attorney in downtown for several years, and I understand the mindset of the professionals, the new residents of downtown; and (2) I have worked in Skid Row for several years, having served as the pastor of Love LA. Therefore, I feel that God has prepared me for this role.

IV. The Vision: What Kind of Church?

A. Mission Statement

To be an inclusive, gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ who connect people to God, grow together, serve the city, and extend God's kingdom.

B. Core Values (corresponds to each word in the mission statement):

Inclusive: Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Socioeconomic: There are four reasons why we intentionally want to be a multi-ethnic and multi-socioeconomic community:

- *Demands of the Context.* Downtown is a very multi-ethnic and economically diverse community, ranging from Skid Row residents who are homeless to loft dwellers who are mostly professionals. It is a unique community in that there are significant numbers of Anglos, Asians, Latinos, and African-Americans in and around downtown. As such, the only way to effectively reach the people in downtown is through a church that reflects the community in its diversity.

- *Biblical vision.* The Bible shows us a picture of a new city where people of all nationalities and backgrounds come to worship Jesus. In addition, there are numerous examples in the New Testament of churches where Jews and Gentiles and the rich and the poor worshipped together because of the unifying power of the gospel.
- *A place to invite friends.* Most of us work, go to school, or have friendship networks in multi-ethnic contexts. As society has become more multi-ethnic, churches need to become more multi-ethnic in order to effectively carry out God's mission.
- *A conviction that God has called us to build such church.* God has called us to build a church that is inclusive of all races and all socioeconomic backgrounds and model unity that comes from the gospel, not from natural affinity.

Gospel-Centered: The gospel is this: "We are more sinful than we can ever know and we are more loved than we can ever imagine, at the same time." The gospel is not essentially about rules and how to live, but about our failures, and what God did to rescue us from the pit we've created for ourselves. God rescued us by sending Jesus to die for us on the cross, paying the penalty for our sins. God demonstrated His justice and love towards us through what He did on the cross to rescue us.

A Loving and Honest Community: We want to be a community where we care for one another, and can be vulnerable, where we can be accepted even if we are messed up, different, poor, rich, average, arrogant, meek, a sinner. We want to mourn with those who are mourning and rejoice with those who rejoice. We want to love homosexuals, people who look like they have it all together, homeless people, and people living outside of God. We want our church to look like Jesus. In addition, our faith in Jesus is not blind but grounded in solid historical evidence. Our faith also compels us to be emotionally honest with God and others. As such, we seek to be both intellectually and emotionally honest.

Lovers of Jesus Christ: We love God, and so, we seek an intimate relationship with Him which is made possible by what Jesus has done on the cross. We seek Him primarily for the pleasure of His company, and not just for what He can bless us with or what we think we can do for Him.

Connect People to God: We are passionate about welcoming people who are not in a relationship with God. As such, we don't want to create a church primarily for ourselves; we want to create a church primarily for our friends and neighbors.

Grow Together: In order for us to grow together, for inside-out transformation to happen, we need to live by the Spirit, which we believe encompasses the following four things:

- Believing the gospel with all of ourselves (intellectually, emotionally, volitionally, spiritually), not just to become a Christian, but also to grow as a Christian. *The gospel is the substantive foundation for Christian growth.* It is only when we realize the truth of our sins and the power of His grace that our hearts are changed from inside-out and transforms our lives.
- Drawing near to God as *Abba* (daddy) in an intimate relationship with Him as a loved son or a daughter, walking in His presence every moment of our lives, and obeying Him. Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, worship, Bible study, solitude, confession, and fasting help us develop this intimacy with God. *This is the procedural foundation for Christian growth.* Through this intimate relationship with God, He transforms us from inside-out.
- Being empowered with the Holy Spirit. We are asking God to empower us with the power of the Holy Spirit in order to prevail over the dominion of the powers of darkness. We expect God's supernatural power to be a part of our Christian growth. *This is the fuel for Christian growth.*
- Doing it together. We believe that transformation happens in the context of community. *This is the context for Christian growth.* It is through godly relationships that we spur one another to live by the Spirit.

Serve the City: We seek to be good news even to those who are not a part of the church because we become a part of the city and serve to benefit the city. We want to love the city because God loves the city. We network and partner with other groups and organizations to collectively serve the city. We also seek to help people integrate work and faith. In addition to sharing the gospel of Jesus with people at work, we seek to help people love, serve, and transform the city through their vocations.

Extend God's kingdom: We seek to send people out to build the kingdom outside of our local church and become a part of the movement of the kingdom, particularly by church planting both domestically and internationally.

V. Timeline

Here is my present timeline of major markers:

1/1/08: Change status at YNEM from Pastor to Church Planter in Residence

1/08: Church Plant team training

1/31/08: Kevin's last day at Young Nak

2/08: Start pre-launch worship services

3/24/08: Easter: Soft Launch

Fall, 2008: Hard Launch/Grand Opening

VI. Launch Strategy

1. Grow a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic core group of about 20-30 people. This is in process. As of January 1, I have about 20 people from various different backgrounds committed to the church plant. In addition, I have about 20 people from various different backgrounds praying about whether they should join this church plant team.
2. Soft launch on Easter Sunday. Do outreach campaigns to get people to come out to the service.
4. Build the core team to about 50 and build a quality praise team, an excellent children's ministry, nurturing small group ministry, and a vibrant mercy ministry.
3. Hard launch/Grand Opening in Fall, 2008. Do massive amount of evangelism and outreach to invite everyone in downtown LA to the church. Here are some of our outreach ideas:
 - Direct Mail Campaign to approximately 20,000 people in downtown four times. If we do this right, church planting studies have shown that we can yield at least 150 people to check us out. Even though direct mail campaign is not cheap, we feel that it is a strategy that will pay off.
 - Advertisement in Downtown News (a small local newspaper).
 - Press releases about the church launch (Downtown News will do a story about us in their next issue—they already interviewed and took pictures of me, so I feel that they will likely do a story when we launch). The fact that we are seeking to launch a multi-ethnic and multi-socioeconomic church in downtown might catch the attention of LA Times's Connie Kang).
 - Getting the word out through the email networks of downtown residents.
 - Getting the word out through Love LA, missions, and SROs, T-shirts, flyers etc.
 - Hand out flyers around downtown.
 - Hand out water bottle with "New City Church" and website address at community events.
4. Continuation of outreach via bridge events but focused more on friendship and relational evangelism

VII. Potential Location

We are in negotiation to rent ImaginAsian Center, which is a brand new state-of-the-art theater in downtown seating about 250 people, for our Sunday morning worship services.

