

# Asking the Right Questions

A new Covenant church in Seattle offers coffee, conversation, and community.

EUGENE CHO

On Sunday mornings at Quest Church in Seattle, about 150 people—believers, skeptics, and even cynics—gather together for worship. The average age is about twenty-six. There are college students, single adults, married couples, a handful of older members, and four children. People in the congregation come from a variety of different nations and cultures.

The congregation is a mix of those that are churchied, unchurchied, dischurchied, and overchurchied. One of them is Joanie, who had never stepped foot into a church before coming to Quest. She was raised as a Buddhist, and visited Quest through an invitation of a friend. She has been with us ever since, and continues to wrestle and rejoice about the possibility that a man named Christ was indeed the Son of God who came to die for our sins and reconcile us unto God.

Tony, who was living what others perceived a “successful” life, woke up one morning wondering if there was more to life. His questions led him to Quest, and through many conversations (and many more questions), Tony came to understand and believe that truth was indeed personal in Christ. He was baptized into the body of believers last year.

Quest Church or “Q” as we are known, is often referred to by outsiders as a postmodern church. Although we are mindful of the postmodern thought

process, if there is a word that best describes who we are, it would be “emerging.”

During the Reformation, the Christian Church examined itself and its culture and, most importantly, held itself accountable to the Scriptures. It began to deconstruct (or rethink) the purpose and movement of the church, in hopes of becoming a movement that remained faithful to God, to Scripture, to history and tradition, and to its present context and culture.

Quest is a church in that spirit. It hopes to never arrive but to continually emerge and to remind others that the Reformation never ended but is an ongoing process.

In 2001, a handful of people began to meet with my wife, Minhee, and me with a simple desire to *do* and *be* church. We wanted to be a church with a passion for diversity, worship, community, transformation, and justice. For the first several months, we studied and meditated on Acts 2:42-47—a description of the first churches.

From the beginning, we have challenged people to relinquish the consumer mentality that affects all of us. We offered no promises of free gifts, extravagant productions, marketing gimmicks, or the answers to all one’s questions or issues. Instead, we simply extended an opportunity to experience community and Christ.

At Quest, we’re more concerned

about the process rather than the product. The most humbling lesson for me in my recent years was asking God to change the way I define success and how others defined me or our church. We want to be a church not of programs, but of people who are compelled by God to use their gifts and ideas to interpret and convey the grace of Christ. In doing so, we have come to the simple realization that “there is



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nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

We are often visited by others who are trying to do “new stuff” in order to bring new people into their churches. They want to copy what we do, but there is absolutely nothing new here at Quest. Granted, it may look different from the typical Covenant church. It may sound different, smell different, and feel different, but ultimately our mission and vision is just the same.



This former warehouse houses the Quest church, community center, and café.

attention as a space for a nonprofit café and community center we wanted to start.

Both congregations began to pray to seek wisdom, and with much support from the conference, we received permits from the city of Seattle to work on the building. After three months, the work was completed.

It has truly been a wonderful partnership. Interbay, led by Pastor Ray Bartel, took out the loan in their name and extended friendship throughout

We're learning that instead of the need to provide answers, products, and methodology of how to do church, it is more important to ask the right question. For so long, the church, enamored by tradition and methodology, accentuated the need to inform people "how we worship." But the more powerful question to answer is, "Why do we worship?" Experiencing that paradigm-shift liberates us to understand that everything can be redemptive by the power of God.

And so, after months of Bible study and few months of regularly worshipping together, we launched our church on October 14, 2001. When we first started meeting, we were not a Covenant church—we were just a local group of believers. But as we journeyed forward, we knew the value and need to be part of a larger Christian body. We had months of conversation with other pastors and denominations, but

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we were very moved by the Covenant's passion and commitment for mission, justice, and church planting. We saw an opportunity not simply to be encouraged by the Covenant in what we are doing, but an opportunity where our community church could impact and serve the denomination. Simply, we saw an opportunity for a relationship.

As we were looking for a place to hold our weekly services, we were introduced to Interbay Covenant Church in Seattle by Don Robinson, associate superintendent of the North Pacific Conference office.

Interbay had purchased a warehouse next to their church building about twenty years earlier, and had used it for minis try in the past. At the time we started talking with them, it was vacant and no longer being used. The 4,500-square-foot building (a combination of office spaces in the back and a larger open warehouse space in the front) drew our



A children's program at the Quest Community Center

the process. Ed Buffalow, our architect, is a member of another local Covenant church. Quest raised funds for the project, helped design the space, and provided people power to complete the renovation. And the conference provided encouragement for all of us.

If someone had told us, as we were launching Quest, that we'd be in this situation we would have been absolutely shocked. It has been amazing to see God work through this situation and



A worship service at Quest

Eugene Cho is lead pastor of Quest, a new Covenant church plant in Seattle, and executive director of Quest Community Development. Quest invites you to stop by if you're ever in the Seattle area so that they can treat you to the best coffee/tea in the world. For more information, visit [www.sea.org](http://www.sea.org).

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in these partnerships. Although Quest and Interbay's worship spaces are side by side, both churches have experienced significant growth. It has indeed been a very fruitful partnership.

Having the warehouse allowed us to start a nonprofit organization called QCD (Quest Community Development). As a church, we did not want to simply talk about our faith—we wanted to do something significant for our community. The warehouse includes the Q Café, a coffeehouse that doubles as our worship space; a community center with a computer lab; a tutoring/mentoring center; and conference rooms. Profits from the coffeehouse will be used to pay for outreach ministries. The café opened in late October, and we met more new people in the first month of business than we had met in the previous year as a church.

Our purpose through the café and center isn't to convert people. We often joke with people that nothing suspicious has been doped into their coffee. We simply want to build relationships, serve,



**Eugene Cho addresses the congregation at Quest.**

and meet people where they are. Customers include local neighbors and business people, students, the homeless, and others who simply want to see what we are doing. Through our commitment to building relationships and serving people, numerous people who have never gone to church have expressed interest in our church.

Different forms of art by local artists hang on our walls. The Q Café also hosts a live music on Friday nights and an open mic night on Saturday evenings for poetry slams, singers, and songwriters.

The intensity of planting a church,

going through a building/renovation project, the stress of finances, along with other things, have weighed heavily on us. But realizing that this has been a "God thing" has been liberating—it's O.K. to relinquish control and simply trust God.

Recently I was reminded of how God's power can work in our ministry at Quest. As I walked out of my office, I noticed three people sitting at one of the tables in the coffeehouse. There was Leah, a member

at Quest who took a significant pay-cut to leave her previous job to become our full-time "café manager and minister." There was another customer, and then there was a homeless woman who has been trying to get off the streets. Together they sat there, sipping coffee, playing cards, and sharing stories.

There was something to that image. We need to spend some more time in our busyness to sit, drink, and eat together, share our stories with one another, and, more importantly, share the greatest story of God's amazing love—both in word and in deed. □

## Learning to Trust God

**B**efore starting Quest church, Eugene Cho and his wife, Minhee, were part of a large, second-generation Korean church outside of Seattle, where he was one of the pastors. The church was growing and the ministry was flourishing, but Eugene says that he and Minhee felt a sense of unrest. They felt God was calling them to minister in an urban setting, in a multiethnic church.

"After several years of struggling with the decision, we left that church," Eugene says. "But things didn't work out the way we planned—the next year was really difficult because I just could not find work to support us as we followed this call."

After some very difficult months, Eugene says that things began to change in December 2000, after an experience he had while praying. "I kept telling God, 'This isn't what I thought would happen. I feel like I've lost control of my life.' And I felt

the Holy Spirit was saying, that's what we have been waiting to hear—you are not in control, you need to surrender."

A few days later, Eugene got an early morning job at a Barnes and Noble bookstore as a custodian. From six to nine in the morning he worked all alone in the store, cleaning toilets and getting things ready. "As a result," he says, "my prayer life got a lot stronger. There wasn't much else to do when you are all alone at that time of the morning."

Eugene says that he carries the lessons learned during those early morning prayer sessions with him in his work as a church planter.

"Now," he says, "whenever I feel frustrated with what's going on at Quest, I remember that I don't *have* to do this, I *get* to do this. It's a privilege. God's kingdom is going to flourish whether I am involved or not, but I get to be a part of it." □