

Celebrating C4SO's Asian Pacific American Leaders: Dr. Min Soo Choi with the Rev. Dr. Jin Cho

Jin Cho ([00:05](#)):

Hey, good morning, C4SO. I am the Rev. Jin Cho with the Revelation 7:9 Task Force for Racial Diversity and Inclusion. But during these heritage months, we like to feature a member of C4SO, somebody who is newer than us that people might not be familiar with, so we can introduce others to their stories and perspectives. And recently I had the wonderful privilege of getting to know Min Choi. Unfortunately, we share a very similar name. So we've already been joking that people are gonna get our names mixed up. We'll see how that goes. But Min, tell me a little bit about yourself—where you are. Tell me a little bit about your family and what you do for our diocese.

Min Choi ([01:03](#)):

Well, thanks so much, Father Jin, for having me. My name is Min Soo Choi. I'm Korean—it's a very Korean name, I think. I currently live near Portland, Oregon in a little town called Newberg. I attend Church of the Vine, which is a C4SO church with the Rev. Sean Flannery. And I am married to Sarah, and I have three young energetic kids, Isaac, Nora, and Theo.

Jin Cho ([01:41](#)):

How old are they?

Min Choi ([01:43](#)):

They're almost 8, 4, and 2. And so we are a lively household right now.

Jin Cho ([01:52](#)):

So you've got a lot going on. That's a fun age, but energetic is a nice way of putting it. <laugh>.

Min Choi ([01:59](#)):

Yeah, that's true.

Jin Cho ([02:00](#)):

Yeah. <laugh>. So, you have one of my favorite titles. As you know, Anglicanism is all about titles. We like lots of interesting titles that people outside of the Anglican world do not understand. You don't have a particularly Anglican title, but your title is nevertheless cool: "Media Architect." So what does that title mean? Tell us a little bit about that.

Min Choi ([02:29](#)):

Well, first of all, I'm also learning what that means. It's a title that was created as I shared interest in joining C4SO and the communications team with Andrea [Willits], Eric [Vinson] and Bliss [Lemmon]. Let me just tell you a quick story. The original role was just a Social Media Manager, and despite me hating any titles with "social media" in it, I reached out and was interested. I was thinking about ministry and technology, which is connected to what I was studying at the time and since I've graduated. But as I was conversing with Andrea about my passions, my calling, it was apparent that it's not just social media that

I'm interested in. I'm not here to just manage accounts and post things. I really have a deep desire to think about theology as well as culture in the intersection of technology and especially digital media.

And so we came up with this title of Media Architect. It's not something that I invented—it's something that was proposed with Andrea and Bishop Todd. The position, as I'm learning, is just really being thoughtful and hospitable and doing ministry through our structures of communication. And that's why it's a Media Architect role, where we think about not only what we communicate, but how we communicate, and what mediums we communicate through. And as we build those up, that creates culture that creates our ability to tell the story of the gospel, to tell C4SO's story. And so I think that's what a Media Architect within the context of C4SO is all about.

Jin Cho ([04:33](#)):

So, telling our stories in the new digital age with the different venues and forums available to us with the internet and our Smartphones—all that stuff.

Min Choi ([04:50](#)):

Yeah. Over the last 15 years, there's been a lot of debate about how the Church should think about technology and how the Church should disciple and teach about technology use. And I think that's been an incredibly important discussion to how we connect in culture. It's sort of what I get passionate about.

Jin Cho ([05:17](#)):

Yeah. So I am still going to complain about my title, or lack thereof. I'm jealous that they came up with [yours]! So this is your passion. This is sort of your calling. You, in fact, did your Doctor of Ministry on this [topic]. So tell me a little bit about that, where you did it, how you did it—and how this connects.

Min Choi ([05:54](#)):

Absolutely. So, in late 2019, I wanted to go after after my Doctor of Ministry. And there was a program at Portland Seminary, which I ultimately enrolled in, that focused on semiotics, church and culture.

Jin Cho ([06:19](#)):

Explain that a little bit more. What do you mean, semiotics, church and culture? That's a lot right there.

Min Choi ([06:32](#)):

The most basic dictionary definition of semiotics is the study of signs. It comes from the Greek word for signs. Christian semiotics is really about understanding how the different artifacts of culture inform us, shape us. What a semiotician really does is actually traced biblically back to the tribe of Issachar. So if you study 2nd Chronicles... We might have to cut this part out because I'm forgetting the reference.

Jin Cho ([07:14](#)):

We're definitely gonna keep this in.

Min Choi ([07:16](#)):

<laugh>. Totally. That's fine. I don't mind embarrassing myself. But there is an Old Testament reference to the tribe of Issachar being the people who understand the sign of the times. And that informs the entire kingdom of Israel about what is God doing in the world. How is God moving? How is God changing things in culture? So semiotics is all about understanding the subterranean messaging that happens

through everything we look at. Now that we live in a media-saturated era, we have to be really, really diligent in understanding what culture is saying and how the Church can respond to that and engage in that. Just a couple weeks ago, in our [lectionary readings], we read from Acts 17, where Paul goes to Athens. That passage really exemplifies in the New Testament the semiotics of the gospel of Paul entering into the Areopagus and [being] willing to engage with the pagans, with the elites, with the leaders of that city, and in the end, persuading some to put their faith into Christ. I think that's what semiotics is really all about.

Jin Cho ([08:43](#)):

That's a powerful statement. One of the things we've talked about is how to read what God is doing in the context of culture. Right? So Paul goes into this pagan culture and he reads God in it, in such a way that people there can now understand and receive him instead of being scared or offended by [Paul's] culture or the foreignness of [that] culture.

Min Choi ([09:36](#)):

I think it's a beautiful lesson [that] at the beginning, Paul is "provoked." That's what it says. The author says that Paul is provoked by all the idols, and it moves him to engage rather than condemn or judge or fear.

Jin Cho ([09:54](#)):

That's super cool.

Min Choi ([09:55](#)):

I think that's the heart, that we should embody more when there's more voices in the arena, when there's more voices in the room. We shouldn't [doubt] that we have a gospel that can contend, that can compete, that can shine light into all the confusion and the dissonance that we experience as people living in a social media age. That's what inspires me and gives me hope that we can actually move towards [culture] and not be afraid of it.

Jin Cho ([10:32](#)):

So in terms of what it means to be the Church during these times, semiotics is to have this deep confidence in and of Christ so that you are able to engage and encounter the times to see what God is doing there, to point those things out for the sake of the kingdom, to do mission work, to read the culture and how God has already engaged with that culture.

Min Choi ([11:15](#)):

That's right. It is a faithful acknowledgement that God, the kingdom of God, is in the midst of our culture and working. The spirit of God is moving and working and orchestrating. To be a witness and a watchman of that is an important role or identity that we should embody.

Jin Cho ([11:42](#)):

So I think I saw a little bit of your D Min work, and it was presented in a video format. Is that right?

Min Choi ([11:50](#)):

That's right.

Jin Cho ([11:54](#)):

It wasn't just like an iPhone video, a selfie of yourself walking around, but it was an actual video. Describe that a little bit, and describe your project a little bit.

Min Choi ([12:07](#)):

Yeah. Let me talk about two things. First of all, when I went to seminary in Chicago in at the start of 2010, that's when social media started to gain traction in our communities and in culture. And so I had a really unique experience of having to navigate my theological education with this new social novelty that we were all kind of getting immersed into. I've been a photographer and videographer for 20 years now. I've always been interested in it. It's my favorite tool and one of my favorite technologies. This idea that we can capture a moment in time and then share it later with other people, I think that's deeply theological, deeply gospel-centered—this idea of documenting and telling our stories. And so that initially [piqued] my interest: How can we use this tool?

Min Choi ([13:04](#)):

I noticed that in the first decade, the Church has predominantly responded [to social media] with strategies of modesty or even, "that's counter to how we can be effective in ministry." I always felt like, I'm not sure if I buy into that fully. I do understand that there are dangers and concerns, but I do think that if we can understand this tool and use it in appropriate ways, it can actually create more connection, more incarnational ministry. Ultimately I carried that thread into my doctoral work. The project was called "The Inevitable Church." And the whole point of the project was: How do we be faithful today as the Church so we can ultimately bridge and connect to the future Church? How do we start imagining and being curious about how God is working inside and outside the Church to form an expression of the Church that's coming in the near future, and use all of this technology appearing before us? I had this imagination that the Church is going to look very differently on the outside, from a surface level, 100 years from now—just like how [today's] Church looks completely different than a 100 years ago and 200 years ago. There is "form" difference—not substance difference. So the basic meat of the project was to be thoughtful in creating content using really high-level video production processes, scripting and writing, and being thoughtful about how to tell a story over an arc.

Min Choi ([15:18](#)):

So I got heavily invested in video production. It's become my professional craft in many ways. I do that for a living. I got into writing and producing and editing and directing and all these things. And I'm realizing it's a whole universe in itself, but one of the hopes is that this is something anyone can do as technology becomes more ubiquitous and more democratized. Your phone now can do the whole [thing] from beginning to end. You can be thoughtful and skillful in telling your story and engaging culture with the gospel—sort of doing what Paul did at Athens because we sort of live in one giant arena of thought. We can share it on [a larger] scale. And so I think it's about discipling this next generation how to engage and not just be consumers. It can be entertainment and that's fine, but to be content creators—not necessarily marketers or influencers, but just able to navigate the digital landscape. Ultimately ... how do we create hospitality and have a digital front door for people to come in? Those are the things that I talk about in my dissertation.

Jin Cho ([16:46](#)):

Yeah. Wow. So we glimpsed just a tiny bit of what you are passionate about and what you have been doing in your work with our diocese. I have kids that are in high school now, and I know that their world

is completely different from the way I grew up. As much as I like to keep up and try to stay hip with the kids, I just know that the influence, the way they take in media, the way they think about media, the language of what influences them, what conveys truth to them, is very different from how I grew up. You know, I could tell them, "Read a book," but it's just not gonna be the same experience. I'm glad that they know how to read, but their world is different. And I think that's what you're saying: How do we engage? This is the next generation. This is our world.

Now I would love to take you back a little bit ... You've connected with the Anglican world that loves to connect with age-old liturgies. What is the connection for you there? Clearly, something happened to [lead] you to enter this world.

Min Choi ([19:06](#)):

Absolutely. I think there is, as a follower of Jesus, a call to a paradoxical commitment to going all the way back to the beginning, right? And then to think about how God is unfolding history into the future. As a good Anglican, I think the Via Media comes to mind: "Hey, we have to do both." We have to know where we come from, because the story ... has come through centuries of swapping hands and swapping into different cultures, then ultimately coming to me in this generation. That's the perception I ultimately have to continually talk about, which is, I'm all about the novel. I'm all about progress and what's new. But it comes from a deeply honoring place of where it all started. It all kind of threads together that way. What I see is that the gospel is resilient and stays true, but it takes many forms as it moves from point to point in history. I deeply love Anglican tradition because it is so committed to doing that without falling into this singular mindset of only defining tradition in this very narrow way. There's something new to learn today as well. I think there is an example of humility that I try to follow, which is that we have the gospel, we have the scriptures, we have the traditions. I think what Anglican tradition does really well is there's room for more—there's room to understand what's happening [today]. That's one of the key things I latched onto when I moved from ... my very evangelical story to the Anglican tradition.

Jin Cho ([21:32](#)):

... What I hear from you is a deep trust and deep confidence in the gospel, and the understanding that our liturgies are not a hearkening back to the past, but rather it is alive, and it is a living liturgy that is meant to feed us for our times. And even though they may in some ways look the same, [these liturgies] are experienced differently because of the times, the people and the culture. I think that's what you're asking us to step into. I think there are a lot of priests and clergy who are engaging in this conversation—I'm sure struggling with this conversation right now—and I love that there's somebody who has thought about this very deeply. So I'm gonna encourage all of those folks to get in touch with you and hopefully, that will lead into some more interesting conversations.

Min Choi ([22:52](#)):

That's my heart too. What I want to do is be able to connect and engage in the conversation and ultimately try to help anyone who's looking to develop some of these tactics, these avenues for ministry. As a generation of churches, one of the challenges we will face is how to connect with the younger generation as we get older. I'm getting older too, and so it is difficult to keep up. What my kids are learning is completely different than how I grew up learning. The saving grace isn't novelty or being tech savvy, because I think one of the great crises of today is mentorship. It's this idea of, how do we connect our differences and see that as a beautiful thing? "Hey, we grew up differently, and I celebrate that." "How do we celebrate the younger generation?" That's a heart of mine.

Jin Cho ([24:09](#)):

We're spending a lot more time than I thought, but this is such an important topic because right now in the news, you know, the surgeon general just came out with an actual warning about social media, and was it Montana that just banned TikTok? So all that too, right? You've got these things that [cause] fears and anxieties, especially among older generations, about what to do with this. I think you're not saying, oh, let's adopt or [let's] exclude, but rather, we can't ban it out of existence. We need to have a better way to engage with it. Churches that are going to do this well for the next generation are gonna be the ones that are actually thinking and having conversations with people like you and the next generation, the younger people, to hear what they're feeling, what they're seeing. And then [doing] what faithful people have always done, the mission work of stepping into cultures, and [doing] the hard work of discerning. I think that's the work that is ahead of us.

Min Choi ([25:57](#)):

Absolutely.

Jin Cho ([26:00](#)):

So you're a candidate for ordination. Tell me about your thinking, your discernment process, as you thought about what it means to step into holy orders. Do you just wanna wear a collar? You know, it's really uncomfortable. Men collecting stoles—that's another thing altogether.

Min Choi ([26:34](#)):

I mean, quite honestly, I don't want to wear a collar. Seems very uncomfortable, you're right. As I've learned about what a deacon is or what a priest is, or what holy orders is—at the end of the day, when I reflect on my own story, for most of my adult life, the middle of college till now, I've dedicated everything that I have to wanting to do ministry for the Lord. And so for me, what's unshakable is this lifelong call to serving the Church and wanting to really connect and engage the next generation of people who are going to do the work of the kingdom. What's peculiar about my story is that there were perceived opportunities to maybe go into a vocational, pastoral ministry earlier, but for some reason, this is the route that God had me on. I think about, what does a deacon do in this world? Or what does a priest do at the local level in their parish? I deeply connect with that role or responsibility—that's sort of how I've seen myself. That's what God has revealed about me.

And so, yeah, it's been a long process. I've been sort of on the sidelines. I did a lot of parachurch ministry. I did college ministry for about a decade. I worked with Bible college students on campus, living with them in the residence halls. That was a profoundly challenging and beautiful experience because I got to experience what it means to be growing up as a young person in a digitally fracturing world, you know what I mean? That informed my desire to be pastoral and my desire to really make it about the gospel. Because at the end of the day, I was confronted with problems that I could not solve. There were things I just knew I could not do, only the spirit of God could do.

It really doubled me down on the need for the gospel, the need for community and the need for our churches to be grounded in scripture and grounded in community. I don't know if I answered your question directly, but that's what I've been thinking about. That's what affirms my desire to pursue holy orders. I believe the work that I do ultimately resonates deeply with my understanding of what a deacon is supposed to do. To be someone to analyze what's happening and inform the Church and the body about how we can respond—and to remind the Church that we can't only pick and choose certain aspects of the gospel. We have to be able to engage [in] what God is actually calling us to. And so it's not just, you know, going to the desert and immersing ourselves in theology and doctrine. It's also going into

the city and into the places where there's great need and confronting the political, social, economic and racial issues that we face today. Those are really important pieces to the gospel. Otherwise, we are to be pitied because we are hypocrites in our message. That's my passion.

Jin Cho ([31:14](#)):

You're talking about so much of the passions of C4SO, being able to read the signs. And I think good Anglicans are people who are learners, right? So you're reading the signs within the context of liturgy. You're realizing not just with words, the explicit words, but with the implied motions, the smells, the sights, and all of the movements, you're reading the signs of what God is doing in the context of worship. And then you do that outside of worship as well, outside of the walls of the church. C4SO is all about reading the culture.

Min Choi ([32:05](#)):

Absolutely.

Jin Cho ([32:06](#)):

I hear that deep resonance. It's really cool you are doing that. I think there are things that you could definitely teach us as well. So we're having [this] conversation in some ways to center diverse stories. I actually struggle with how to say this because I'm not trying to center diverse stories as much as to say that there are stories we haven't heard or perspectives that I think are helpful for all of us to hear. And we gain something whenever we hear from different perspectives and different ways of living, different ways of looking at reality. So tell me about your heritage. What does your cultural upbringing mean to you? And what sort of insight does it give you into your faith? That's a real softball to you because I know you have a lot there.

Min Choi ([33:15](#)):

When I think about this question, I immediately think about a person—my mother. She was a single mom and an immigrant. I grew up in Columbus, Ohio. I was born in the mountains of Korea, about two hours south of Seoul, in a place called Seosan. God brought us over here, and we were able to connect to a local Korean church. My childhood was a tale of two worlds, really. Like in [our] house and at church, it was pretty much like I was in Korea. It was deeply Korean. And my mother really wanted me to have a sense of a Korean identity—that was really important to her in the midst of a Midwestern culture. She really wanted to run the household and make sure that I understood things that I could be missing, like community and what it means to be family first—really thinking about that in the midst of an American Midwestern individualistic culture. So I think about my mother who took me to Korean-speaking class and took me to Kumon and these places that we joke about because it's such a common experience [for Asian families].

Jin Cho ([34:48](#)):

Kumon, the bane of every Asian child's existence. <laugh>.

Min Choi ([34:52](#)):

Exactly. I look back on that now and I am incredibly grateful for my mother's resilience in showing me the way. I think in the short term, like all the way up through high school, it really messed me up. <laugh>. It really was challenging to always have to feel different, to always think differently. I always had to struggle with thinking about my mother and my sister and making sure that as the eldest son in

the family [that I was] really thinking about [them]. That was a deep struggle and pretty much overwhelmed me throughout the course of my teenage life.

And then it really messed me up in college because I wasn't really prepared. It was the next level of having to navigate not just one or two cultures, but a multitude of different people and different backgrounds and still not knowing what I should be doing. College became this inflection point in my life where I had a dark night of the soul and then dedicated my life to Jesus. But ... my upbringing [is] where my strength and my own resiliency come from today. Throughout my whole life, I've had to practice that ability to close the gap, to be able to meet people where they are, even when they're not realizing that I have to work really hard to understand where they're coming from and for them to understand me as a Korean American—as someone who has deep Korean values and roots. There's a lot of loss, I think, that's happened in my life, like loss of opportunity to connect and share who I really am because that road is often so dissonant and there's such a huge gap. I speak English better than Korean, so people don't [often] get to see that side of my story.

Jin Cho ([37:49](#)):

Right. As people who are in between cultures or bicultural immigrants or people of color, [we] have these stories that are so precious to [us]. It's rare to have a space that encourages you to bring them together. So you have to keep them separate. But the power is in bringing them together—the opportunity and the joy is in bringing them together. I'm glad that you pointed that out because I think that is the sort of space we want to encourage people to step into and listen to others. As people who are living in these sorts of code-switching worlds, whether or not we want to, we are playing the role of a bridge. We're bridge builders between cultures to translate—and not just translate like, there's another cognate for this word or cognate for this experience. No, you have to tell stories. Every time you translate a word, you actually have to tell a story because it brings up different feelings and emotions and sense of priority every time you share these things. That's a huge opportunity that as a society, we're just starting to learn is important.

Min Choi ([39:36](#)):

You just said something incredibly brilliant that I hadn't thought of.

Jin Cho ([39:41](#)):

I like you already, so you didn't even have to say that, but go ahead.

Min Choi ([39:45](#)):

What you said was, you can't just tell definitions, you have to tell stories to connect. And it just hit me—that's why the gospel is a story. If it's a story that's going to transcend and skip the pond and go to other places, then the only way for us to even feasibly understand each other is through storytelling. And I think that's why I'm so passionate about being skillful in our modern ways of storytelling. And let me say this also: I'm not an expert in one culture or the other. I feel like where I live is on that ferry boat of crossing between one side to the other. I think that's what a lot of third-culture kids experience. I've come to really value being that in-between and being on the fringes and living in that world because I think, ultimately, ministry is about connecting. I love the idea that I can sort of move from one side to the other and embrace the liminality.

Jin Cho ([41:10](#)):

We started this conversation saying that we're gonna try to keep it to a 30-minute conversation. So we're way over.

Min Choi ([41:16](#)):

Way over. I'm so sorry.

Jin Cho ([41:17](#)):

So much material. So, so much good stuff. I can't even think of what we would possibly cut. Let me close by asking you this one last question: You do a YouTube channel about high-end sneakers.

Min Choi ([41:47](#)):

That's right.

Jin Cho ([41:49](#)):

Tell us a little bit about that.

Min Choi ([42:02](#)):

I started my doctoral program at the end of 2019, and then, you know, the pandemic hit. I didn't plan this, but [my channel] became a lifeline because it gave me structure. I don't know what I would [have done] if I didn't have something to focus on during that time. I had [also] wanted to understand how you can go from zero subscribers to having an active channel. I have a deep affinity towards things that are valuable, but consumable. It is this paradoxical challenge—do you collect it or do you consume it? What do you do? Wine is like that, you know, cheese can be like that. If you collect anything, like Pokemon cards, do you open that pack, or do you try to keep everything mint? I love those kinds of things because I think it's a deeply theological practice that we're doing there.

But sneakers to me [are] a personal thing. [Growing up] I could only buy one pair of sneakers a year. And I grew up in a culture where what you had on your feet was incredibly important. So not only did I have to pick wisely at the beginning of the year, my shoes would get destroyed by week two, but that's the pair of shoes that I had to wear. And so I could never get these expensive ones—Jordans and things like that. The best I could do was like a mid-range New Balance. <laugh> New Balance was really popular at my school. And so shoes were a big deal. It was like a social order. There was a caste system.

Jin Cho ([44:04](#)):

Oh, for sure.

Min Choi ([44:06](#)):

I think shoes speak and tell the story of culture. So ever since Michael Jordan really put Nike and Jordans on the map, we've associated shoes with cultural markers. We have them in songs. They transcend sports and hip hop and leisure wear and athletic wear. They're now in movies, toys, animated shows. Shoes are now ubiquitous. And so what you have on your feet tells a story. And for me, I love following that story because it tells us a lot. I'll plug something, I'm not really associated with them, but I think it's really interesting. There's a site called Sneakers and Preachers, where they post pictures of various speakers [and their shoes]. Some of them are really prominent with very, very expensive footwear. That's really interesting because I think we share this common understanding that it's not just about the

price tag and the exclusivity of it. Those shoes are meaning-making. And so what are we trying to understand? I just like de-codifying that world a little bit.

Jin Cho ([45:36](#)):

Thank you so much for participating in this very wide-ranging conversation. So much fun. I hope it truly encourages people to reach out to you and share with you and maybe ask questions or share their passion for some of these things as well. It was great chatting with you, Min.

Min Choi ([46:07](#)):

Father Jin, thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it. This was so much fun.