



Rev. Esther Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea to devout Christian parents. In 1990, she immigrated to the United States with her parents and younger brother, Daniel (youth ministry director at Gary UMC in Wheaton, IL). They eventually settled in the Chicago area and attended grade school in the Forest Park neighborhood of Chicago and high school in Skokie.

An important place of comfort was the Korean United Methodist Church in Park Ridge. Though Esther heard the call into ministry in her last year of high school, she decided to pursue another career and went to the University of Illinois at Chicago for a degree in education. While in college she stayed involved in her

home church and also served as a leader at the campus ministry. After working as a special education assistant for one year, she worked at a financial institution while teaching in her church Sunday School. Eventually, she pursued an MDiv at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and ordination in the UMC.

In 2010, Esther received her first appointment to the small rural towns of Tampico and Harmon, followed by Overflow Ministry, an English-speaking congregation within South Suburban Korean United Methodist Church in Flossmoor in 2013. In 2015 she was appointed to the UMC of Geneva as the associate pastor and then in 2020, to Deerfield: Christ UMC.

Esther married in 2013 and divorced in 2021. She has two children, Aria (6) and Brielle (4). She also has a 12 year old Maltese Yorkie, Endy and 5 month old, Cutie. When Aria was born, Esther's parents Young Ja and Ho Young were able to retire from their cleaners business and moved into the parsonage as live-in babysitters which they graciously continue to do as their ministry, serving God and the church.

Esther serves in many capacities with the conference including the Northern Illinois Conference Episcopacy Committee, the Lake North Shepherding Team, and the Korean UMWomen Clergy covenant group. She has also been on the Board of Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors, the Annual Conference committee, Aurora District Shepherding team, District Superintendency committee, and the Open Methodist Group - a gathering of Korean UMC clergy advocating for the Korean LGBTQIA+ community. Esther has also attended and taught at the Walk to Emmaus Quad cities and completed a 2+year Institute of Congregational Development program in our conference. She is currently pursuing a DMin in Spiritual Direction at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.