

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is the Fourth of July. Each year, on this day, I often think about my ancestors and the immigrants from many different countries throughout the world who live or lived, here. With the exception of those persons of indigenous descent, all of us come from immigrant families who settled in what we know as the United States.

This week, I received an email from McCormick Theological Seminary, where I got my Master of Divinity degree. The email spoke of a young woman who was a classmate of mine, Shinhae Oh. She is being honored as the first recipient of the Moffett Faith and Courage Award from the seminary.

I recall meeting Shinhae in her first year at the seminary. But, I didn't completely know her story, until I read the email. Here is what it said--

Shinhae Oh was awarded her Master of Divinity degree from McCormick in 2020. Many of us have heard parts of her extraordinary story, escaping from North Korea, finding her way into and through China before making it to the US as a refugee. We did not widely disclose, of course, the details of her journey as there were concerns for her safety. Her story has now been made public in a book of portraits and stories by former President George W. Bush called ***Out of Many, One, Portraits of American's Immigrants.***

As noted in the narrative that accompanies her portrait, Shinhae "agreed to be part of this project on one condition: that her story would be shared **not as a credit to her, but as a testament to God and the people who have helped her throughout her remarkable journey.**" In the book, Shinhae says, "I am interested in pastoral care, which is an important factor in the inner healing of defectors who have been through so much. My experience as a defector has opened my heart to care for other people who have overcome many hardships to obtain their freedom yet all are still in pain. I believe each one of us, no matter where in the world we were born, deserves a life full of happiness and peace."

As we reflect on our independence on this Independence Day, may we pray for the many persons in the world who do not know what it means to be truly happy, or to be free. May we also pray for a country and world filled with God's justice and peace.

Pastor Cathy