

Changing Congregational Culture



Instructor Guide

Church Renewal Resource
Evangelism Ministries USA/Canada Region
Church of the Nazarene

Acknowledgments

Director of Course Development - Dr. Lyle Pointer

Author of Module - Dr. Lyle Pointer, 2016

Curriculum Developer - Thea Ardrey, 2016

Graphic Designer - Jackie James, 2016

Evangelism Ministries

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Preparation Checklist

The following information will help you prepare to instruct this module.

- Review the material and make notes of specific areas for special emphasis.
- Check to ensure the following materials are available:
 - PowerPoint presentations
 - Participant booklet (copy as needed)
- Gather the following materials:
 - Pens and/or pencils
 - Other material you want to use
- Check the classroom for:
 - Projector
 - Sufficient number of tables and chairs for the participants
- Arrange the room so each church team sits around an individual table and you have ample room to move among the teams.

CHANGING CONGREGATIONAL CULTURE

Module at a Glance

The table below identifies each module section, the time allotted for each section, and a brief description of the section's objective. When you are familiar with this module, you may want to teach from this page rather than the detailed information.

You may wish to teach this module in a two-session format to allow sufficient time for the Small Group Discussion and Action Planning/Reporting. In the first of the two sessions, we recommend you conclude with the Small Group Discussion. Complete Lecture Part II at the second session.

If you choose to teach this in one session, please note that it will take approximately 75-90 minutes.

SECTION	TIME	PAGE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
I. Introduction	5 mins.	5	Introduce module, purpose, and objectives.
II. Lecture Part 1	10 mins.	6-8	Presenter provides background and inspiration for the telling the Gospel through stories.
III. Small Group Discussion	15 mins.	9	Participants discuss five questions in order to integrate and apply the information presented in the lecture.
IV. Lecture Part II	15 mins.	10-12	Presenter provides more information on how to alter the culture of a congregation in order to reflect the values of Christ's Church.
V. Action Planning/Reporting	15 mins.	13	Participants assess their current status as a church and consider how they might best change their own congregational culture.
VI. Module Wrap-Up	5 Mins	14	Close the module with final comments regarding the topic.
Total Module Time: 65 mins.			

I. Module Introduction

(5 minutes)

Notes

Let the participants know the material is theirs to keep and encourage them to take notes.

- Purpose
- Objectives
- “Fill-in-the-blanks” for the lecture
- Application exercises

The purpose of this module is:

To alter the culture of a congregation in order to reflect the values of Christ’s Church

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Notes

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Changing Congregational Culture

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II. Lecture Part 1

(10 minutes)

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. The culture of a local church **DETERMINES** if a congregation will accomplish its mission.
 - a. For the culture includes how a church communicates, handles diversity and adversity, and makes decisions.
 - b. The people who have the power and how they **OBTAINED** this authority affect the life of the congregation.
2. How people **RELATE** to each other also makes up the culture.
 - a. How they treat each other constitutes the norms of behavior.
 - b. Fellowship undiluted by smoldering conflicts allows a congregation to thrive and to affirm each other.
3. The culture is **DEFINED** by unwritten rules.
 - a. For example, newcomers may be warmly welcomed, but friendships may remain closed to them.
 - b. In the foyer of the church building greetings and small talk are **OFFERED** while hospitality at a deeper level may be rarely experienced.
4. Unvoiced expectations **SHAPE** a culture.
 - a. “Don’t you know?” or “you should know” express the unexpressed.
 - b. Newcomers are unreasonably expected to fit in and to adjust.
5. A church culture is a set of **UNEXPRESSED** rules that shape how a congregation relates, communicates, and problem solves.
 - a. Does the congregation gently communicate or bluntly tell each other what they think?
 - b. Do members guess and gossip or does leadership address those sins and call for reconciliation?
 - c. Who is consulted and who is shunned in decision-making?

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6. We need to **DISTINGUISH** between culture and values.
 - a. Values define the behaviors the church **EMBRACES** in order to fulfill its mission. e.g. honesty, integrity, faithfulness, compassion and evangelism
 - b. Culture **REVEALS** how we live out those values as a congregation.
 - c. Culture **EMBODIES** our efforts to express those values to reach our mission.
 - d. The closer culture **REFLECTS** Christian values, the more effective the ministry.
7. Church culture may be called “the personality of the organization.” The personality can be seen in:
 - a. The behavior and attitudes of the people;
 - b. The appearance and décor of the facility;
 - c. The values, beliefs, and assumptions of the organization;
 - d. What is celebrated and how problems are addressed (Samuel Chand).

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I. Describing your Church’s Culture

Samuel Chand classified church cultures in the five following ways:

1. **INSPIRING** cultures, that encourage people to bring their best to the church’s ministries, **CULTIVATE** trust, respect, and creativity and to give clear direction.
2. **ACCEPTING** cultures are good places to serve and to **NURTURE** a positive work/ministry atmosphere. They have leaders who invest in developing people, yet they have a tendency to avoid difficult topics or decisions and can experience turf wars at times.
3. **STAGNANT** cultures begin with a clear vision but over time lose **ENERGY** and stagnate. Leadership values people based on what they can accomplish for the cause, and staff/volunteers tolerate their leaders.
4. **DISCOURAGING** cultures suck the life out of people, leaving them hurt, angry, and confused because they spend their time trying

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to **SURVIVE** power struggles and protecting themselves from blame. People become discouraged by vision; as their efforts were not affirmed in the past, so they wonder why their effort or involvement matters.

5. **TOXIC** cultures may appear to be great, but the organization has people damaged by disrespectful leaders. Leadership holds the power even though it **DELEGATES** responsibility. Faith, creativity and risk-taking vanish because of the domineering attitude of leadership.

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III. Small Group Discussion

(15 Minutes)

Notes

Discuss the following questions in your small group.

1. Analyze the culture(s) that most describes your congregation. This exercise is to describe not to bash your church.
2. Select one of the five characteristics most like your congregation and discuss the factors that would improve the culture.
3. Talk about the level of trust and respect found in the congregation.
4. How do members and attendees respond to vision, goals, and change?
5. Where do you perceive your congregation's culture to be on this continuum?

Anxious (Fearful) ←————→ **Anticipation (Futuristic)**

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IV. Lecture Part 2

(15 Minutes)

Notes

II. Present Influences on Your Congregation's Culture

A. Leaders shape the organizational culture--whether they intend to or not.

1. How we **LEAD** creates a certain type of culture.
2. The culture is **FORMED** by whom we choose to be part of the teaching, leading, and deciding process.
3. We create culture in what we **PROMOTE**, celebrate, and pray about as a congregation.
4. As leaders we must discover what **MOTIVATES** our congregation.
5. Find out what people like about the church and what makes it healthy.

B. Time **ERODES** awareness.

1. The longer attendees belong to a church the less aware of the culture created in that place.
2. While things may seem good and healthy, a newcomer to your church can notice quickly what is healthy or unhealthy. *#Like a stain in the carpet we walk past every week without doing anything about it, over time the once obvious becomes invisible to us.*
3. Since others pick up on the culture right away, we leaders need to build ways to learn what is healthy and unhealthy from those new to our church.
4. We **CHOOSE** to nurture what brings health and to change what hinders growth.

C. Healthy cultures **ATTRACT** and keep healthy people.

1. Healthy people have low tolerance for unhealthy cultures and will leave.
2. So what is an unhealthy culture?
 - i. A culture with unnecessary drama and gossip.
 - ii. A culture which is self-focused. . .
 - ...is dictatorial and authoritarian;
 - ...belittles and demeans creativity.

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3. Healthy people don't like these types of cultures, so they **LEAVE** and look for a church that builds up and empowers people.
 4. Unhealthy people are not **COMFORTABLE** in healthy cultures because few put up with their unhealthy behaviors.
 5. Unhealthy people will either **INCREASE** their volume until they get the attention they desire or they will seek out another unhealthy church that will give them the attention they desire.
- D. The culture of a church impacts the long-term **PRODUCTIVITY** of an organization.
1. The more we work to create healthy cultures, the more effective we will be in **ACCOMPLISHING** our mission.
 2. A congregation's effective ministry depends upon:
 - i. Accessibility to necessary information;
 - ii. Ability to have unfiltered debate without being hurt;
 - iii. Freedom to collaborate across ministry lines and not be territorial.
 3. The culture we create related to these issues affects our ability to be productive.
- E. Unhealthy cultures are slow to **ADAPT** to change.
1. Churches that grow the fastest and are the healthiest are not **FOCUSED** on their church members but on the needs of those outside the church.
 2. They are **LOOKING** outside themselves for ministry opportunities.
 3. Unhealthy cultures are focused on themselves, on their inward relationships, and how to keep those we have happy, comfortable and coming.

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4. When unhealthy churches focus on whom they already have, they tend to **RESIST** change and miss opportunities to impact the lives of those outside their walls.

III. Changing the Present Culture toward the Future

- A. Give leaders and workers **CONTROL** of the areas in which they volunteer.
 1. Give clear direction of expectations when delegating.
 2. Give those serving the authority, responsibility, and resources to be successful.
- B. **SEEK** for understanding so each person can clearly articulate the vital aspects of the vision, their role within the team and how the team makes decisions and operates.
- C. Develop leaders, not workers, by **DISCOVERING** potential leaders.
 1. Find ways to develop them.
 2. Then deploy them in roles that fit their passion and challenge them.
- D. Create and nurture trust at all costs for when trust is lost, the team disintegrates.
- E. Don't be afraid of failure or dissenting opinions, but be **SECURE** enough to see these as tools to help yourself and the team grow.
- F. Be **RESPONSIVE** to change, stepping into opportunities and walking away from what is not working.
- G. Be sure to follow through and **EXECUTE** the plan developed, for the lack of follow-through creates distrust and hinders people's belief in the organization.

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V. Action Planning/Reporting (5 Minutes)

We want to create a healthy church culture that nurtures Christ-like disciples. Changing the church's culture takes time and effort; anticipate times of discouragement.

1. Start changing the culture by identifying little things that move toward health. Ask:
 - a. Do leaders need to start following through on what they say they will do?
 - b. Do leaders need to be better listeners, willing to see the kernel of truth in other people's opinions and insights?
 - c. Does our communication need to improve? How and in what areas?
 - d. Do we need to seek forgiveness for past hurts and wrongs, even if they were done by former leaders who are not even around anymore?
 - e. Does there need to be teaching on how to handle disagreements within the Body?
2. Creating a healthy culture in a church is difficult and may take many years to become a reality.
 - a. But this effort affects whom you are able to reach and whom you are able to keep.
 - b. Changing the culture determines what you are able to do and how quickly you are able to do it.
3. Ask questions of those in your church, especially those who are newer, concerning how they would describe your church, its ministries, and how it operates.
 - a. Their insights will tell volumes about the culture you have created.
 - b. They will give feedback into the progress being made.
 - c. Their perspectives reinforce your efforts to create Christ-like disciples in your congregation and community.
 - d. Who needs to know this information?
 - e. What method of communication will encourage implementation of this information?

VI. Module Wrap-Up

(15 Minutes)

This section provides an opportunity to close the module.

End the module by praying together. Based on your group, you may want the entire group to pray together with different people leading, or you may want to instruct the participants to pray in their teams.

Resources:

Chand, Samuel R. [Cracking Your Church's Culture Code](#)"

Johnson, Tony. Articles to Pastors on the WAPAC District Church of the Nazarene.

Stanley, Andy. "Five Inescapable Truths about Organizational Culture"