

Changing Congregational Culture

Participant Booklet

The purpose of this module is: To alter the culture of a congregation in order to reflect the values of Christ's Church.

II. Lecture Part 1

INTRODUCTION

1. The culture of a local church _____ 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 _____ this authority affect the life of the congregation.
2. How people _____ 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 _____ 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 _____ while hospitality at a deeper level may be rarely experienced.
4. Unvoiced expectations _____ 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 _____ 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?
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 _____ how we live out those values as a congregation.
 - c. Culture _____ our efforts to express those values to reach our mission.
 - d. The closer culture _____ 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).

I. Describing your Church's Culture

Samuel Chand classified church cultures in the five following ways:

1. _____ cultures which encourage people to bring their best to the church's ministries, _____ trust, respect, and creativity and to give clear direction.
2. _____ cultures are good places to work and to _____ a positive work/ministry atmosphere, have senior leaders who invest in developing people and culture, yet they have a tendency to avoid difficult topics or decisions and can experience turf wars at times.
3. _____ cultures begin with a clear vision but over time lose energy and _____. Leadership values people based on what they can accomplish for the cause, and staff/volunteers tolerate their leaders.
4. _____ cultures suck the life out of people, leaving them hurt, angry, and confused because they spend their time trying to _____ 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. _____ cultures may appear to be great, but the organization has people damaged by disrespectful leaders. Leadership holds the power even though it _____ responsibility. Faith, creativity and risk-taking vanish because of the domineering attitude of leadership.

III. Small Group Discussion

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)**

IV. Lecture Part 2

II. Present Influences on Your Congregation's Culture

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

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

- B. Time _____ 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 _____ to nurture what brings health and to change what hinders growth.
- C. Healthy cultures _____ 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.
 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 _____ in healthy cultures because few put up with their unhealthy behaviors.
 5. Unhealthy people will either _____ 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 _____ of an organization.
1. The more we work to create healthy cultures, the more effective we will be in _____ 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 _____ to change.
1. Churches that grow the fastest and are the healthiest are not _____ on their church members but on the needs of those outside the church.
 2. They are _____ 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.
 4. When unhealthy churches focus on whom they already have, they tend to _____ 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 _____ of the areas in which they volunteer.
1. Give clear direction of expectations when delegating.

2. Then give those serving the authority, responsibility and resources to be successful.
- B. _____ 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 _____ 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 _____ enough to see these as tools to help yourself and the team grow.
- F. Be _____ to change, stepping into opportunities and walking away from what is not working.
- G. Be sure to follow through and _____ the plan developed, for the lack of follow-through creates distrust and hinders people's belief in the organization.

V. Action Planning/Reporting

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?