

Culture Shock

During my World Changers mission trip to St. Louis in 2004 I conversed with a man from the city about the history of a church in the downtown area. He began to tell me it had over 600 in Sunday school at one time during the early 50's & 60's. The church was located in downtown St. Louis and their facilities took up a full city block. The church had great vision, great leadership, and a passion for missions but most of all a desire to reach the lost. As time went on the neighborhood began to become a more diverse ethnic area. The church decided not to reach out to these more diverse ethnic groups. Attendance began to drop, no souls were being saved, and there was no discipleship or evangelizing. The pastor led the congregation to sell the property (which they could no longer fill or afford) to a more ethnic congregational church and proceeded to purchase 10 acres outside of town in a new suburb. Shortly after relocating, their Sunday school average dropped to about 30 with some 60-80 in worship. It closed its doors shortly thereafter. The ethnic congregation though thrived. They reached not just the community with the gospel, but also internationally through missions.

“The strongest force in an organization is not vision or strategy - it is the culture which holds all the other components together. Culture is the strongest force in any organization. It is the atmosphere in which the church functions. It is the prevalent attitude,” says Samuel R. Chand author of the book, *Cracking Your Church's Culture: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision & Inspiration*.

Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-39: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Have you ever been to a new place and said to yourself (or others), “Something’s different.” Without knowing what it is - you just smelled “culture.” Think about the different cultures in different restaurants, schools, churches and even homes. There is no such thing as good or bad culture, because culture is about groups of people. But it is mainly about being healthy or unhealthy. Every church has its own culture. Culture is the most crucial component of the church. If a good steak is the vision, then the plate on which it is served is the culture. If the plate is dirty then the steak (vision) is devalued.

If the Bible is left in the rack attached to the pew and no longer the foundation guide for the church - the culture will obviously suffer. Church culture can begin to decay whenever the focus is more on things like money, programs, buildings, even worship style (as good as all of those can be) rather than on living our lives as children of God for the glory of God. Whatever distracts us from the very core of the church (our Gospel mission and calling) will injure our church culture.

There are healthy church cultures. Culture is transmitted via words we use and trust is the adhesive that holds a church together. We give our best effort and go above and beyond the call of duty in a trusting environment. There are no perfect churches, but there are some who have staff with long tenures, where change is manageable, and where people truly live out the Biblical model of church. That is why churches need to become highly intentional about creating a sustainable healthy and Godly centered culture.

Keep the Faith,

Bro. Andrew