

SPIRITUALITY CORPORATE STYLE[©]

by

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Leaders have many responsibilities. One responsibility is to create and maintain the culture and climate of a congregation, part of which is spirituality. Spirituality is seeing and experiencing God's presence in the world, the life of the congregation, in the lives of congregational members. Leaders create and maintain culture and climate of spirituality in five ways.

Articulate the congregation's ecclesiology, values, and expectations for members

The foundation of a spiritual climate is a congregation's ecclesiology. This ecclesiology includes: 1. Jesus is the head of the church, 2. The church assumes Jesus' ministry. 3. The church is sent into the world. 4. Through the church non-believers are transformed into believers. And, 5. The church is a spiritual, caring community. The last statement means for the church to be church there needs to be a climate in which God's presence is seen and felt by the congregation and its members.

Congregations have, or should have, clearly stated core values which identify the congregation's expectations for its members. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville, Minnesota has the following core values/expectations of its members expressed in the acronym "PoWeR SuRGe." Members are expected to PRAY daily, WORSHIP weekly, READ the Bible, be of SERVICE to others, be in RELATIONSHIP with other Christians, and GIVE generously. These values and expectations define how the congregation and its members see and experience God. These core values articulate the congregation's spirituality.

Articulating the congregation's ecclesiology, values, and expectations needs to be done repeatedly. Without redundancy, the foundation of a spiritual climate ceases to exist in the conscious mind of its members.

Accepting different learning preferences

One model of learning preferences maintains individuals learn through 1. the spoken and written word, 2. through visual stimulus, and 3. through kinesthetics. Each preference represents approximately one-third of American society.

The primary medium of learning up to the last quarter of the 20th century was the spoken and written word. Preaching, lectures, and reading were the way learning occurred. Many congregations today rely primarily on this medium of the spoken and written word to communicate the Gospel.

In the last quarter of the 20th century, America was transformed from a word society to a visual society. Today, children learn by watching cartoons with a message, searching the internet, and playing video games. Business leaders use PowerPoint as a means to highlight data with graphs and pictures. By using PowerPoint, churches add visuals to spoken sermons.

The third learning preference is kinesthetics. Too often liturgical movement is taken for granted and those in the pew do not know the message behind up-lifted palms in prayer or the extending of arms in sharing the peace. Here, as in articulating the congregation's ecclesiology, there needs to be constant reminders why liturgical movement occurs.

When those who plan worship, educational events, or fellowship opportunities use

only one learning preference, the spiritual climate of the congregation is narrow. When two or more preferences are intentionally used, the spiritual climate is expanded.

Honoring personality temperaments

There are four personality temperaments related to spirituality. 1. There are those who favor tradition and continuity. They experience God through history, established liturgies, and virtuous behaviors. 2. There are those who favor spontaneity and movement. They experience God through change. They love action and want to follow their inner-spirit. 3. There are those who favor experiencing God through relationships. For them, people are more important than anything else. They need to be constantly reassured that God loves them just as they are. 4. There are those who favor knowledge and logic. They experience God by looking into what lies beneath a biblical text or what a symbol represents.

Too many congregations design their worship, educational events, or social opportunities around just one of these personality temperaments. For example, mainline churches highly favor tradition and continuity while free-standing non-denominational congregations usually cater to those who experience God through spontaneity. A climate of spirituality designs and offers experiences to meet the preferences of all four temperaments.

Four forms of prayer

There are four forms of prayer defined through the acronym ACTS. ACTS represents prayers of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

It is my experience that congregations and denominations emphasize one form of prayer almost to the exclusion of the other three. For example, mainline congregations emphasize prayers of supplication. Every petition in a prayer asks God to do something; i.e., to bless, to help, to guide, etc. Even petitions of awe and thanksgiving have a supplication added to them. The more charismatic a church the more likely prayers of thanksgiving dominate prayer life. "I (we) thank-you for the beautiful

day, sending us encouragement, and for the large offering this morning."

The spiritual climate of a congregation grows when all four forms of prayer are part of the prayers at worship or prayers in small group gatherings.

Leaders sharing their spiritual stories

George Gallup reported a number of years ago that 36% of Americans had a supernatural experience which they credited to God's intervention in their lives. These Americans also reported that they were afraid to tell their pastors, fellow church members, and friends about the experience out of fear that they would be dismissed. They were specifically afraid that their pastor would belittle the experience or consider them some kind of fundamentalist in the most negative terms.

One way for pastors and church leaders to encourage talk about the ways that God is seen and experienced is to share their own faith stories. Their stories may be of a supernatural nature or of God using daily routines to love, nurture, guide and direct their lives. In the telling of such stories, permission is given for others to tell their stories. In the telling of stories a culture of spirituality is created and maintained.

Summary

Corporate teachings and functions such as continually articulating the congregation's ecclesiology, worship, educational, and pastoral care provide opportunities to create and maintain a climate of spirituality in a congregation. In planning these events, a leader needs to intentionally provide experiences to meet the individual spiritual preferences of all congregational members.

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