# Culture and Change

*"Culture is the personality of the Church or organization."*

*Samuel Chad*

## Introduction

Culture is all about who we are. It defines what we do, how we behave, and what we value. It is also key to the realization of a parish vision. Similar to the Sower in Jesus' parable, (Mt 13 1-23), when we cast our vision into a toxic culture, there is no fruit however, when we cast vision into a healthy culture, the vision will become a reality and bear fruit. Additionally, culture can and does change. It is shaped by what we celebrate and what we tolerate.

When assessing culture, it is helpful to not only reflect on our own parish experience, but consider the experiences of others, especially guests and newcomers. In order to form a healthy culture, we need to be intentional about how we express our values and expectations for the parish. Additionally, we should be clear about how and why we make decisions, and how these decisions are ultimately aimed at engaging parishioners and empowering them for the work of mission.

Culture is important, and we must understand it if we hope to change it. Culture has a major role to play. It is a driving force for result it influences how people interact, how teams operate, and the parish morale in general.

## Aspects of Culture

- Tangible Aspects of Culture
    - ➢ Of course, there are some things we have no control over. Look for the positive impacts you can make, and how the interior of our Churches, social gathering spaces, office, etc. send a positive and welcoming message to those who enter.
    - o Physical arrangement of our parish buildings and grounds.
    - o Signage
    - o Cleanliness
    - o Hospitality
    - o Homilies
    - o Hymns
- Intangible aspects of Culture
    - o Parish values
    - o Decision making process
        - ➢ Consider the who (teams or individuals) make decisions, the discernment process and reason behind decisions.
    - o The primary interests of a parish
    - o Emotional engagement of parishioners

## Health vs. Toxicity Exercise

"All relationships need to be worked at it they are to be healthy. The same is true of leadership teams, staff teams and ministry teams. In churches, we need to be proactive in addressing unhealthy behaviors and attitudes at all times. We also need to be working out of agreed standards and ways to address toxic behavior or attitudes. Every team needs to define what is healthy and what is toxic behavior.

# DIVINE RENOVATION

We all have bad days, but as one of our leadership coaches says, 'when a bad day turns into a bad week, flags should be waving. A bad week, however, can never be allowed to turn into a bad month when we are in leadership. There is too much at stake.' We need to love and care for one another and our mission so much that we are willing to call each other out and help get things back on track.

Take time right now with your leadership team to brainstorm behaviors and attitudes that are healthy and to be desired, and behaviors that are toxic and to be avoided. Both healthy and toxic behaviors need to be named. Healthy behaviors need to be celebrated and toxic behaviors need to be named and called out in love. Your common agreement that such behaviors are not tolerated is your basis for this kind of conversation.

This is a great exercise to repeat with every single team in your parish and whenever new people join your teams. Remember, culture is created by what we reward and what we tolerate. We do not tolerate toxic behavior just because someone works hard, has been around for a long time or wears a roman collar.

First, discuss what attitudes and behaviors are healthy and make a list. Then define the attitudes and behaviors that create a toxic environment and list them."

*Excerpt from the Divine Renovation Guidebook, pages 182-183*

- o   Develop key beliefs and values.
- o   Recognize and celebrate things done well.
- o   Identify and commit to behaviors we want.
- o   Be accountable to one another.

## Mission over Method

There are countless industry stories of corporations that had a successful model, and when faced with change, doubled down on their strategy, only to become irrelevant. Kodak and Blockbuster quickly come to mind. Just because something was done one way successfully yesterday, does not mean it is going to be successful today. Henry Ford used to say, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." Our mission to go and make disciples is too important to be hampered by methods of the past that have become ineffective. Always the perfect guide, Jesus models this Himself. If Jesus were attached to method, He would have never left the Temple, much less challenge the Scribes and Pharisees.

While care must be given to the past, we must boldly move forward. A note should also be added that to be innovative and change does not mean to change our Catholic Tradition, but instead reconsider the way in which we proclaim the Gospel and make disciples.

## Rogers Innovative Curve
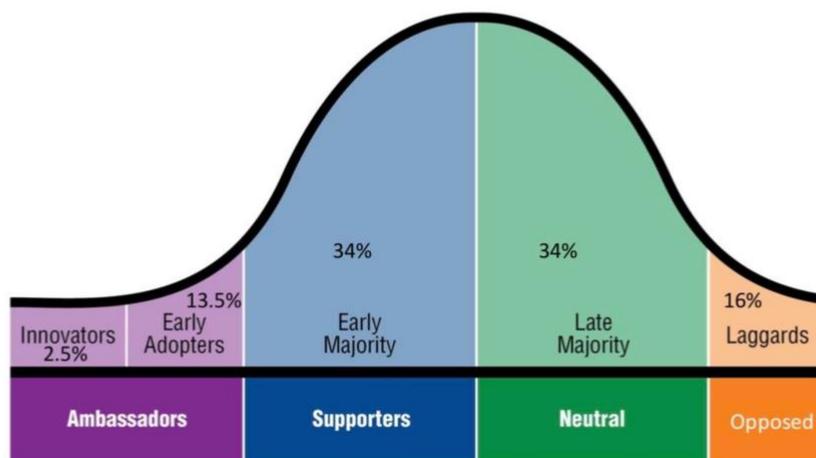
- People buy into change at different rates.
- Focus your energy on the first 16%. Strive to win over your Innovators and Early Adopters despite any negativity.
- Early Adopters win over the Early Majority
- The Early Majority wins over the Late Majority.
- The Laggards will never be won over, and will often be very vocal and seem bigger than they are.
- We will never have 100% on board but can get a critical mass of people that believe in the mission and can help us in that cause. Just because some will never come along does not mean that the Holy Spirit has not inspired us to do this. Remember Jesus died on the cross, not because everyone liked it, but because He knew the mission true and timeless and saving.

## Priests

- We encourage long term pastorates, so the time needed can be invested in the parish to see the change.
    - o Speak to your Bishop about what you wish to attempt, and the time you feel you will need.
    - o Culture change, when done too fast can lead to culture shock. When done prayerfully, discerning the right times and strategies, it can lead to culture shift.
- Priests lead the culture change.
    - o Normalize healthy vs. toxicity assessments in all parish teams.
    - o Preach about the culture needed for the vision to take root and bear fruit.
    - o Allow the mission, not method, to shape the culture.

# Culture Change

- To change culture, we first need to identify our culture, what changes we want to make, and the values we need to embrace to make change possible.
    - Assess values.
        - ➢ Make an honest assessment of the parish values.
        - ➢ 10 Common Values Shares by Healthy Churches.
            - Giving Priority to the Weekend
            - Hospitality
            - Uplifting Music
            - Homilies
            - Meaningful Community
            - Clear Expectations
            - Strength based Ministry
            - Formation of Small Communities
            - Experience of the Holy Spirit
            - Become an Invitational Church
    - Identify what needs to change.
        - ➢ Ask what you tolerate and what you celebrate.
        - ➢ Ask, whether you embrace mission or method.
- Examples of Culture Shift (change)
    - Increase in giving
    - Hospitality
    - Discipleship rather than membership.
    - Primacy of evangelization
    - Formation of leaders around their gifts.