

Eight essential practices to create a healthy church culture

by Matt McCraw

Conversations about organizational culture were all the buzz just a few years ago. Though the discussion may have quieted down recently, the importance of a healthy church culture remains as vital as ever. At its core, organizational culture is how your church behaves. It is essentially, “how we do things around here.”

Approximately ten years ago, I conducted a research project examining best practices for cultivating healthy church cultures. The research identified four key features of a healthy church culture: (1) it is led by a courageous leader, (2) it values the role of people, (3) it shares a common vision, and (4) it is committed to the biblical mission.

These characteristics define what a healthy culture looks like, but how do churches get there? After an in-depth study of three churches with healthy cultures, I identified eight essential practices that can help a church cultivate a healthy culture:

Establish a gospel identity. A church’s culture must be rooted in its love for and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without this gospel foundation, a healthy culture cannot thrive.

Let the Bible shape everything. God’s Word provides the blueprint for healthy churches. By aligning with God’s plan, churches can foster a culture that pleases Him.

Foster a sense of community. A church is a family of Jesus-followers, and healthy cultures work hard to build genuine relationships and community among their people.

Be marked by humility. Arrogance will poison a healthy culture. Church leaders and key influencers must be driven by humility, following the example of Jesus, who was humble and selfless.

Leaders must model the desired culture. Leaders set the tone. If they don't live out the cultural values they preach, it sends a message that they don't truly believe in them.

Train the congregation in cultural values. Church members often desire a healthy culture but may not know how to contribute to it. Wise leaders help their people understand their role in shaping and sustaining a healthy culture.

Empower the congregation. Healthy culture isn't built by leaders alone; it's a collective effort. Leaders should empower their people to participate in shaping and sustaining the culture through leadership, feedback, service, prayer, and more.

Prioritize the biblical model for the church. Above all else, healthy churches consistently return to the biblical model of the church. My research confirmed that Scripture provides the clearest path to a healthy culture.

Whether you realize it or not, your church's culture is shaping every aspect of its life and ministry. For a church to be healthy, it must have a healthy culture. These eight practices provide a great starting point. Remember, God is good, and He can transform any church—including its culture.