Assessment of Cultural Density

We are asking you to come at cultural density in a couple of different ways. In asking you to make this assessment, we do assume that your parishes lack adequate cultural density (true of most parishes) and that it will be important to imagine ways that healthy density might be developed. In doing so, however, it’s critical to understand both what is currently true and how you might realistically build on existing areas of strength.

First, we’d like you to analyze and assess the parish in terms of healthy cultural density. Again, this focuses on identifying what is currently true, as opposed to defenses of why it’s not denser, or creating action plans for improvement. Use chapters 3 and 4 from *Shaping the Parish: A Pastoral Theology of the Parish Church* as the backdrop. Also read David Brook’s “How to leave a mark.”

Complete the chart below; it may well be that you don’t have anything to say in some of the areas. That absence is part of the assessment.

Second, what might it look like if your parish had a deeper expression of healthy density? Complete Episcopal Spirituality & Assessment (see below -- the assessment itself appears on the last page of the document), noting both where you are personally drawn or challenged, as well as where your parish overall is drawn or challenged. Look at the other assessments you completed in preparation for the clinic (Shape of the Parish, IYHS Model, Parish Leadership). Do you see areas of relative strength that could be expanded and deepened? What would that look like? It may be helpful to you to revisit the images in Chapter 1 of *Shaping the Parish*. In some cases, improvement is found by stopping behaviors that inhibit energy or cut across healthy culture, not necessarily by doing something new or different. After reflecting carefully, complete the third column (“Images of what might be”) of the cultural density chart.

Cultural Density Chart

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristics | Your Parish Now | Images of What Might Be |
| 1. Leaders that persistently and skillfully act to build, maintain and strengthen the central ethos and practices of the organization. It’s what they pay attention to, reward, measure, and allocate resources to. It’s also how they respond in times of threat and crisis; drawing on the system’s ethos and practices.  |  |  |
| 2. Leaders that model in their behavior the ethos and values of the organization. |  |  |
| 3. Training and coaching that equips people to function effectively and in accordance with the organization’s values. |  |  |
| 4. Stories and myths that help define the organization, expressing the best of the organization’s life and values. |  |  |
| 5. Collective rituals that celebrate, observe, or acknowledge the defining moments in the life of the organization and/or its members. |  |  |
| 6. Has a demanding entry or initiation process. The person has to choose this life and the cost of belonging. |  |  |
| 7. A physical location that is congruent with the organization’s ethos and provides a setting in which members come together face-to-face. |  |  |
| 8. Clarity regarding beliefs and values. |  |  |

Episcopal Spirituality

The Episcopal Church has developed a particular form of Christian spirituality that has emerged from its roots in Anglicanism and in the American experience. That spirit can be found in most parishes and dioceses of the church (but not all). What follows is just one attempt to describe that spirituality.

A Christian Spirituality

Grounded in the love of God for humanity as seen in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Christian Life is life lived in Christ: "Christ in us and we in him." Worship, doctrine and action are the means by which we participate in the life of Christ's Body, the Church; in her unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. They are the means by which we participate in the Church's mission, "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." We are restored to unity as we are drawn into the prayer of Christ, the mind of Christ, and the work of Christ. In prayer, study, and work we become instruments of God's holy mission.

A Spirituality of Beauty

We tend to take delight in the natural rhythm of life. We rejoice in the beauty of creation and have a strong commitment to environmental protection. Our worship strives for good music, a sense of flow and grace, and poetry and drama. We seek beauty in our worship space using artists, live flowers, and real candles in creating an appropriate climate.

A World Embracing Spirituality

1. Our tendency is to **affirm life and this world**. Those things in life that give us pleasure are understood as being fundamentally good. Fun, our bodies, material things, good food are all accepted as part of living a full life. Our call to faith is linked to hope and love rather than fear and guilt.
2. For most of us the **Christian life is lived in the context of our family, work and civic life**. Those are the places in which the love of Christ may flow through us to offer light and hope in the world. We generally see that process as organic rather than planned. To the extent we have been touched by the love of God we will show that love in our daily life.
3. We see Christian faith as **having political implications**. Episcopalians have a long history of involvement in the civic life of communities and the nation. The individual Christian is called to both inform and act on their conscience. The church doesn’t usually ask its members to accept particular political views but it does ask members to consider in their thinking process what might be understood from the Scriptures, what the church has learned over the centuries (as seen in the Tradition and the contemporary councils of the church) and in their own Reason. As a church we take positions on public issues. Those positions are usually on the liberal side of the political spectrum.

An Adult Spirituality

We value **personal responsibility** **and freedom** in the process of shaping and living life as a Christian. Adults are invited to **explore and experiment with** the resources of Christian and Anglican spirituality to discover ways that best nurture them in the Christian life. We understand that what feeds one person may not feed another. We each work out our relationship with God, each other, creation and self in unique ways. The adult Christian shapes a spiritual life that fits his or her own personality and circumstances. Please note -- this isn’t about whether children are included (they are) but about what kind of adults we hope children will become.

A Balanced-Holistic Spirituality

We are moderate, seeking a balanced, reasonable approach to life. It is a life in which prayer, work, study and play have a rhythm, taking into account the whole of experience, ambiguity and all.

An Organic Spirituality

We understand individual spiritual development to be rooted in communal daily prayer that shapes our relationship to God. Decisions are made in the context of communal prayer so the Holy Spirit fills and enfolds us. We are sacramental - "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace;” as Christ was the sacrament of God, the church is the sacrament of Christ in the world.

An Open–Minded Spirituality

1. Our way has stressed **an open-minded, searching approach** to faith. Engagement with God and the church is intended to open us to the mystery that is God. So doubt, questioning, exploration and openness to new insights is a path to God and wholeness of life. This involves being open to what may be learned: from studying and praying the Scriptures, from the wisdom gained as the church has struggled with life’s issues in the past, from the councils of the church today, from the insights and views of other people, and from the application of our own reason and what we have learned from our experience.
2. We see value in **comprehensiveness and ambiguity**. Our way includes holding opposites in tension, appreciating paradoxical thinking, assuming that what appears to be irreconcilable differences may contain a balanced truth, allowing a certain messiness and grayness in our theological and ethical thinking. Living in this way means developing a tolerance of differences in thinking and practice. It also calls for a capacity to listen deeply and respectfully, to have courage in expressing one’s own understanding, to wait on God in silence and with patience. Our unity is not the unity of sameness of thought but a unity of trust in God and God’s wisdom. This makes for a roomy church with space for many (as long as they will accept allowing space for others).

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Episcopal Spirituality – An Assessment

For each characteristic, indicate whether you are personally drawn to this element or find it more challenging. Also indicate how you experience the parish’s overall relationship to the characteristic.

What strikes you about your parish’s expression of Episcopal Spirituality? What role do your own inclinations play in the parish’s culture?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristic | I am drawn to this | I find this more challenging | Parish drawn to/expresses in a healthy way | Parish resists or expresses in a distorted way |
| A Christian Spirituality |  |  |  |  |
| A Spirituality of Beauty |  |  |  |  |
| A World Embracing Spirituality |  |  |  |  |
| An Adult Spirituality |  |  |  |  |
| A Balanced-Holistic Spirituality |  |  |  |  |
| An Organic Spirituality |  |  |  |  |
| An Open–Minded Spirituality |  |  |  |  |