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CULTURAL VALUES

Having considered our biblical values, the next question we're going to want to explore is a more contextual question. This set of values is trying to answer the question: "What do we value that is specific to our church and our context?" Another way of looking at this set of values is to ask the question "How do we do things around here?"

These values are the shared convictions that guide the actions of your church community specifically. They guide your decision-making and reveal the strengths of your church. Cultural values represent the conscious and collective soul of your church because they express your most deeply held ideals. They define your ministry's ethos, acting as filters for decision-making and springboards for daily action. Cultural values are the constant reminder of what is most important to this church and helps release leaders for good decision-making in their ministries.

Here are some guidelines to help you consider cultural values:

First, recognise that in a church plant these are going to develop over time. Building these values is a key exercise in articulating what will shape your culture. But as you're starting out and building this church, recognise that the cement is very wet. Things will become apparent and set over time. Values are not biblical convictions - although they're driven by them - and so they are able to develop and adjust over time.

Second, state them positively. The advantage of a church plant is that you're starting from scratch. So work towards articulating values that say who you want to be and how you want to behave, rather than what you don't want to be. For example: "we are a church that lives out Gospel-courage" is better than "we are a church that doesn't fear failure".

Third, guard your doctrine, free your values. In articulating cultural values, it's tempting to just list your core doctrines. Of course, your values will be informed and shaped by your biblical convictions, but the purpose of these values is not to reinvent the Nicene Creed or the Westminster Confession. You've got the Nicene Creed or Westminster Confession for that. Instead, you guard your doctrine in your doctrinal statements, and in doing so you free up the values for your church to articulate the particulars of how your church plant does things.

Fourth, be careful of having too many. This is not a hard and fast rule, and the number is certainly flexible, but if these are going to be values that actually shape your culture, there need to be enough of them to actually describe a rounded picture for culture setting, but not so many of them that it feels like the Talmud.



Fifth, some values are aspirational, some are realised, but be careful of too many aspirational values. Aspirational values are those you want to bring about, but may not necessarily be values people would observe about you at this time. These are good to have, but worth monitoring over time to see whether there's any progress on them. For example, "we value investing in the next generation of Christian leaders" would be an aspirational goal for a church plant, but if it was still an aspirational goal 15 years down the track, that's a problem. Realised values are those values that are clear and evident in the life of the church. For example, "we're theologically driven in everything we do" is a value that should be evident in the life of the church from the main gatherings, meeting structures, decision-making etc. If you have too many aspirational goals you can end up in a situation where people become cynical about your values due to lack of evidence for them.



Here are some examples of cultural values:

- we're theologically driven in everything we do
- we want to raise up the next generation of leaders for our mission here and throughout the world
- we believe that teamwork will produce better outcomes than working alone
- we go out of our way to listen, communicate, support, and celebrate what God is doing through one another, so that each person and their contribution in ministry is held in high regard

These may not be what you'd choose, but that's the point. They're meant to be distinctive and personal to you and your context.

Take some time now to begin to pencil down the cultural values you want to nurture in your church plant, and whether they will be aspirational or realistic from the beginning. For both these values, begin to identify how the value will shape the culture of your church.

What will it look like for

- how we speak about what we do
- what we decide to do
- what we don't do?

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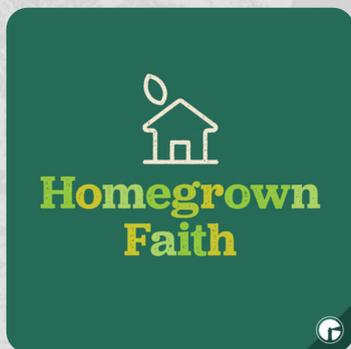
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44 Margaret St, Sydney.

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