

Missional Church Learning Clusters

A Summary of Cultural Values, Practices & Spiritual Issues



UPSCALE COMMUNITIES
Affluent Upscale Families



MAINSTAY COMMUNITIES
Established Diverse Neighborhoods



WORKING COMMUNITIES
Blue Collar Working Families



COUNTRY COMMUNITIES
Rural-Mindset Country Living



ASPIRING COMMUNITIES
Striving Eclectic Communities



URBAN COMMUNITIES
Struggling Diverse Neighborhoods

Missional Learning Cluster Summary

DESCRIPTION OF UPSCALE COMMUNITIES

Upscale Communities reflect the wealthiest households in the nation. An upscale social environment is created by high household incomes, significant home values and top educational achievements. Concentrated in exclusive suburban neighborhoods, these households are predominantly white, college educated and filled with Baby Boom parents and their children living in the metropolitan sprawl. Most of the adults work as executives and white-collar professionals, and their upscale incomes provide them with large homes and comfortable lifestyles. They like to spend their leisure time getting exercise—jogging, biking and swimming are popular—or shopping for the latest in-fashion and high-tech electronics. They are active in community affairs as members of business clubs, environmental groups and arts associations.

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN UPSCALE COMMUNITIES

Commuter Culture

- Suburban housing produces suburban commuting
- Most commuting is from suburb to suburb
 - “One of the key victims of the automobile is the experience of local neighborhood. Since people drive to and from their homes, they do not see, greet or talk with each other much anymore; since they go greater distances to shop and relax, the corner store disappears, and the neighborhood park empties, so removing the chief hubs of local neighborhood life.” (Robert Banks)
- Commuter culture diffuses our personal relationships and connections over a wide geographic area.
 - “Suburban culture is a consuming culture. Fueled by the increasing commoditization of everyday life, suburbia has become the crucible of a shopping economy. There is an intimate and indissoluble link between suburbia and buying.” (Roger Silverstone)
- Consumerism becomes a false god, an alternative religion.
- Acquisition of goods has been changed into financial transactions rather than exchanges of mutual relationships.
 - “Consumer culture makes us constantly aware of what we do not have.” (Aaron Freeman)
- Consuming & branding shape our identity

CULTURAL VALUES IN UPSCALE COMMUNITIES

- Control: “I am in control of my life”
- Consumption: “I am what I do and what I own”
- Covetousness: “I want my neighbor’s life”
- Entitlement: “My life should be easier than it is”
- Significance: “I need to make difference with my life”
- Disillusionment: “My church is the problem”
- Narcissism: “What will the relationship do for me?”
- Efficiency: “I need to get more done in less time”

Cultural Values are taken from *Death By Suburb*



MISSIONAL LEARNING CLUSTER Affluent Upscale Families

*Affluent families living primarily in suburbia
but also in posh neighborhoods in urban
settings.*

SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN UPSACLE COMMUNITIES

Absence of Scarcity

Abundant availability subtly influences our perspective on life

Absence of Hardship

Spiritual awareness is often blunted by our general sense of safety and comfort.

Irrelevance of Faith

When God seems irrelevant to daily life, we lose sight of God.

Missional Learning Cluster Summary

DESCRIPTION OF MAINSTAY COMMUNITIES

Mainstay Communities are the established neighborhoods that are the backbone to small towns and second cities. These Mainstay Communities share moderate educations and a mix of well-paying jobs in predominately blue-collar and service professions. Some of the group's adults are older Americans—aging singles and couples who've already exited the workplace. With their locations outside the nation's major metros, many of these households can afford recently built homes and new SUVs and pickup trucks. They enjoy outdoor sports like hiking, fishing and camping. They are also close enough to big cities to frequent comedy clubs, nightclubs and upscale malls for designer clothes and sporting goods.

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN MAINSTAY COMMUNITIES

Small Town Culture

"Small town culture is like a map deeply embedded in the cognitive structure of those who have lived it." (Martinez-Brawley)

- Strong relational ties
 - Which are often threatened by economic change
 - Which provide a mix of formal and informal positions of influence making political life more complex
- Strong social groups
 - Formal and informal groups sustain community
 - Everyone needs to play a constructive part in the functioning of groups like lodges, clubs, sports associations, retiree groups, Chamber of Commerce, etc.
- Informal group communication
 - Coffee klatches at the local café create a "Café Society" that often endures through many years and keeps the fabric of the small town intact
- Strong schools
 - Significant centers of social life, not only for the children and youth who are involved but for the parents.
- Annual Cycle of Events
 - Time in small towns is given rhythm by the yearly cycle of events. These events not only affect the scheduling of church activities; they are occasions that deepen and convey community identity.

CULTURAL VALUES IN MAINSTAY COMMUNITIES

- Sense of place
 - Live in dynamic relation to the landscape and sensory images of place
 - "The small town image consists of sounds, smells, conversations, vistas, and emotions." (Barber)
- Sense of community
 - "The feeling of being known, of having a role, of making contributions to public life that are noticed and valued, of participating in something worthwhile that is larger than the self, of being able to act compassionately on a personal level, of having journeyed through time with a group that generally accepts each member, warts and all – these feelings are strong and nourishing to small-town residents." (Ferris)
- Sense of longevity
 - "The longer one has lived in the town, the greater the likelihood that one has understood and accepted the town's norms and traditions." (Ferris)
- Sense of forbearance
 - "In living with a high degree of closeness, even intimacy, small town people seem to know innately that they need to bear with one another. Realizing the damage that conflict can quickly do in close quarters, people tend to put up with one another and accept one another's foibles." (Ferris)



MISSIONAL LEARNING CLUSTER Established Diverse Neighborhoods

A diverse group of ethnically mixed singles, couples & families in small towns and second cities.

SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN MAINSTAY COMMUNITIES

Need for Outsider Confidant

"Because secrets are hard to keep and memories are long in small towns, the community needs an outsider who takes confidentiality seriously."

Need for Bridge Building

Build bridges between groups in town
Build bridges between community and larger world
Build bridges to the poor

Need for Healing Division in Community

Creation of "community" in the small town is needed

Missional Learning Cluster Summary

DESCRIPTION OF WORKING COMMUNITIES

Working Communities represent predominantly blue-collar workers in a mix of manufacturing, construction, health services, retail, wholesale trades, and food service occupations. Mostly high-school educated with some college experience, these homeowner households appear in diverse neighborhoods in densely populated regions and small-town suburbs – often living on the edge of metropolitan areas. Ethnically diverse, less than half are currently married. Enjoying lower middle incomes, their incomes provide a stable foundation for their personal and family pursuits in conventional type lifestyles.

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN WORKING COMMUNITIES

•Rituals of Inequality & Social Class

"The experience of class, then, can be seen in terms of rituals of inequality. The first ritual is giving and taking orders. Upper-class people mainly give orders and lower-class people mostly take orders. Middle-class people both give and take orders." (Sample)

"The practice of class is made up of rituals in which those in the lower reaches of the class structure defer to those at the top of the structure. Such deference also has to do with the very bearing of people, even with their posture in the presence of others." (Sample)

•Politics of Distinction & Strategies of Condescension

- Linguistic practices – use proverbs, stories & think in terms of people not specialized vocabulary
- Non-introspective practices– not into pop psychology & “navel gazing”
- Organizational practices – not nearly so goal-oriented as “gather-oriented” – relational, non-hierarchical

•Everyday Resistance

- Refuse to use proper English
- Refusal of propriety; refusing to follow the dominant class’s etiquette
- Set up spaces in places of powerful in order to live and resist
- Populist anarchism

“Such people know how to sap the strength of external forces through foot dragging, sabotage, false compliance, noncompliance, feigned ignorance, slander, and gossip.” This is in response to the constraints of the realities of class --- from the desire to be “free from the institutional entrapments of the modern world” (Sample)

CULTURAL VALUES IN WORKING COMMUNITIES

•Principle of Reciprocity

- Working class people depend on the giving and receiving of favors

•Oral Culture Not Literate Culture

“The language is more embedded in the practices of oral culture -- and increasingly electronic culture --- and seeks not so much precision about the contours of subjective feeling or experience or theoretical position but to point toward an implicit knowing. This implicit knowing grows from events and practices shared with others. These are not conceptualized in theory but invoked by language common to the happenings associated with this kind of knowing.” (Sample)

•Traditional Family Values

"The stereo-type of blue-collar people grows, in part, from their commitment to traditional values: family, faith, neighborhood, and country." (Sample)

"The strongest correlation, by a wide margin, of social class is with authoritarian conservatism; that is, the lower their social class, the more rigidly conservative the men were about human beings and institutions and the less they tolerated nonconformity." (Sample)



MISSIONAL LEARNING CLUSTER Blue-collar Working Families

*Racially mixed, lower-middle-class
blue-collar households living
in older towns*

SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN WORKING COMMUNITIES

Relational and Conceptual thought

Working people make a sharp distinction between theories about God and “actually knowing the Lord.”

Tacit Understanding

Working, oral people “know things they cannot say, feel things they cannot express in words (at least the words of discourse) and believe things they cannot explain.”

Survival and Coping

They “approach faith in terms of survival and coping far more than they do in terms of systematic understanding and coherence.”

-Quotes from Tex Sample

Missional Learning Cluster Summary

DESCRIPTION OF COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

Representing agricultural and mining areas, Country Communities represent middle-aged, mostly white family households living in single-family homes and mobile homes or trailers on country tracts and in rural neighborhoods. They work hard to provide the tranquil life to which their family has become accustomed through farming, agriculture, education, mining and other service industries. Education levels are low and, consequently, income levels are moderately low, falling in the lower middle income range. Driving domestic pick-up trucks, traditional family sedans or compact cars, more than two-thirds of these households do not have children living at home.

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

•Seasons of the Rural Year

Based on the rhythm of nature's seasons

"Rural people are highly attuned to the seasons. People match their work, celebrations and sense of life to these changes in creation. The annual round of work with the soil, animals, and crops is a fruitful source of spiritual learning and worship." (Brown)

•Stewardship of Creation

Connection to land creates concern for stewardship of natural resources

"Respect for the land and a sense of earth stewardship are at the center of the being of rural people." (Brown)

•Gift & Responsibility

Sense of vocation (God's call) to family, land, & community

"Over and over the people who participate in exploration of rural spirituality speak in terms of blessing and responsibility, of being part of God's plan, of working in faithfulness to a deep-seated call. They have a highly aware, though humble, sense of vocation in regard to family, land and community."

•Relationships & Community

Rely on daily and lifelong commitments of family, neighbors, and community

"Every day, despite their pride in being rugged individuals, rural people of town and country know they are interdependent and rely on daily and lifelong commitments of family, neighbors, and community." (Brown)

CULTURAL VALUES IN COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

•The Land is Everything

It is beauty, challenge, satisfaction & identity

Rural families feel a call to the land

•Communal Family Living

Farm families develop closeness that many city families do not have

"The farm is a whole family affair and the children share the family values and workload as they grow into skills and responsibility." (Brown)

•Family Farming a Way of Life

Family farm system of agriculture that provides active community relationships and strong local economies

•Relationships & Interdependence

Interdependence, co-responsibility, and celebration are lived out – intimately and demandingly – on a day to day basis and for the long haul



MISSIONAL LEARNING CLUSTER Rural-Mindset Country Living

*Rural families with outdoor-oriented
lifestyles working in agricultural
& mining communities*

SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

Reliance on the Providence of God

Much of rural life is lived amid uncertainties; thus requiring faith in the providence of God

Sense of Living in Covenant with Creator

Rural people are rooted in the land; the land is entrusted to them and their stewardship in connection with God

Trusting that God will Provide

Rural people learn to trust God for daily provisions and sustenance

Missional Learning Cluster Summary

DESCRIPTION OF ASPIRING COMMUNITIES

This resoundingly diverse ethnic group represents the up-and-coming of American society. Living within easy reach of or within major metropolitan areas, this group enjoys careers in information, sales, administration, education, health and other service professions. As many as 60% of Aspiring Contemporaries are renting singles, many are career builders enjoying a middle income lifestyle in midtier management positions. Many others live the unique lifestyles offered by military and university dorm life. However, this group is also four times more likely to be unemployed. Ethnicity is extremely diverse, and a majority fall within the ages of 18 to 34 years.

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN ASPIRING COMMUNITIES

•Participatory Styles of Learning

Both communicator and listeners both contribute, it is rooted in the situation

"The decline of the modern era is accompanied by a waning in the emphasis on the individual." (Kitchens)

•Leaders are Facilitators

Using flexible, participatory, team structures

"Postmoderns come into the church with a deep mistrust of so-called experts. Their experience tells them that experts have led them more often into danger than into enlightenment." (Kitchens)

•Authority is Distributed Among the Group

Authority is exercised in participatory manner

"If authority is to be broadly shared -- one of postmodern's cherished principles-- then it must be exercised as locally as possible." (Kitchens)

•Interconnectedness, Holistic Living

Everything is interrelated

"Postmodern people experience life in a far more holistic way than simply through their rationality." (Kitchens)

CULTURAL VALUES IN ASPIRING COMMUNITIES

Truth is Personal & Active – "True for Me"

The true is the workable or satisfactory solution of a problematic situation.

Truth is relative - it is based on one's own interpretation

Truth is Experienced

It is not facts to be learned, doctrine to be obeyed, not universal for all

Truth is best understand through experience, not through rationality or reason

Knowledge is Gained through Social Interaction

Knowing how and knowing if; not knowing what and knowing that

Knowledge is constructed by a group through social interaction

Community Relations are "NeoTribal"

Proliferation of specialized segmented groups

Individuals belong to several social groups that shape their identity and answer the question "who am I?"



MISSIONAL LEARNING CLUSTER Striving Eclectic Communities

Young, mostly single, ethnically diverse households living in new homes, apartments or group quarters

SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

Postmodern Spirituality

•*Spirituality is Monistic, Neo-pagan & Polytheistic*
Influenced by pantheism (divine is all-inclusive), panentheism (God interpenetrates everything); animism (souls are attached to all things); spiritism (communicability with ancestral and other spirits); pagan (nature is alive and imbued with spiritual energy); Wiccan (occultic & animistic); polytheistic / eastern religions (many gods)

•*Monistic Technospirituality*

Eastern religion combined with technoculture

•*Resacralization*

resurrection of religious thought

Missional Learning Cluster Summary

DESCRIPTION OF URBAN COMMUNITIES

The Urban Community features a diverse range of residents who reside within major metropolitan cities and towns of various sizes, often in what is sometimes called "inner city" (although the "inner-city" may be the downtown core of a small town). Predominantly African-American and Hispanic, many are single, younger adults (including some single parents). With below-average incomes and above-average household size, this group supports their lifestyles at employment within food and health services, education, retail, and arts and entertainment industries. At the same time, in many places, the Urban Community has double the national average for unemployment. Many single-parent households must balance priorities and budgets. The majority of this segment enjoys apartment living, and those who own vehicles opt for a diverse selection of economy, import, and domestic cars and light trucks.

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

•Culture of Poverty

Culture of poverty theory suggests the poor remain in poverty because of their adaptations to the burdens of poverty

"This culture carries with it poor child-rearing patterns, educational apathy, and a tendency to look for immediate gratification rather than storing up money and opportunity in order to succeed later." (Claerbaut)

•Insecurity as a Way of Life

Grows out of a life experience characterized by a lack of what is called "fate control"

"The poor simply are not in control of what happens to them. They are respondents rather than initiators, reactors rather than actors, passive recipients rather than active participants." (Claerbaut)

•Institutional Racism

Prejudice and discrimination practiced in the day-to-day workings of large institutions

"What is vital here is that once these institutional policies are put into force, they can be carried out by well-meaning, good citizens. In fact, often executors of institutional racism are wholly unaware of their deleterious actions." (Claerbaut)

•Victim Blaming

Middle-class blaming the victim for their poverty, and social problems

Blaming the victim is an "ideology, a mythology, a set of officially certified non-facts and respected untruths, and this ideology -- which has been infused into the very cells of his [the middle-class person's] brain -- prevents him from seeing the process of victimization as a total picture." (Ryan)

•Less family and community orientation

"For the poor child, there is an absence of constructive family conversation, family group activities, and even a sense of what an intact family unit is like." (Claerbaut)

•Fluid friendships with social ties

Urban dwellers are generally networked with multiple groups so information passes through many groups. These friendships are fluid with weak social ties.

CULTURAL VALUES IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

•Resourcefulness

"...prompts individuals to make the best use of what is at their disposal..." (Tonna)

•Secularization

"...human problems are resolved by human means and handed over...to prayer for divine intervention." (Tonna)

•Efficiency

"...searches for ways of doing things that will be more efficacious, more sure, more rapid, over and above intrinsic properties." (Tonna)

•Pluralism

"supports survival in a regimen of competition, grant to all the right to follow their own principles and their own methods..." (Tonna)



MISSIONAL LEARNING CLUSTER Struggling Diverse Neighborhoods

*Ethnically-diverse singles &
single parent renters
living in inner-city areas*

SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

- Love
Demonstrating love for urban people
- Justice
Equity and fairness in regard to urban people
- Community
Community of Shalom – shared common life
- Creativity
Challenging the negative with the power of the gospel
- Reconciliation
Spiritual, social, personal, family
- Hope
Capacity to envision a better future