

Gaining Access to the Conceptual World of a Congregation

The January 13 class session will review elements of a congregation's culture. The key points follow Nancy T. Ammerman *et al.*, *Studying Congregations*, Chapter 3, "Culture and Identity in the Congregation" Nashville: Abingdon Press: 1998, pp. 78-104.

No two congregations are like. They are subcultures within the larger culture, "a network of signals and symbols, conventions that gains logic and then functions in a peculiar way in that group." (James Hopewell quoted in Ammerman *et al.*, p. 78)

Defining a culture of a congregation:

- History, stories, heroes
- Symbols, rituals, worldview
- Part of a tradition
- Part of larger secular culture
- Voluntary, they choose where to belong. Tend to share a common social and cultural heritage

What to look for to determine uniqueness of a congregation's culture:

- Subcultures within your congregation's culture
- See how the congregation defines itself as different or set apart from the world.
- How it is part of the outside culture
- Size of the congregation influences this and number of subgroups within it
- History

Dimensions of the congregation's culture:

A. ACTIVITIES:

1) Rituals, especially in worship.

Rites of intensification and rites of passage and liminal meaning.

2) Other activities

- Religious education
- Fellowship
- Tasks
- "Kitchen work"

3) How are newcomers oriented?

B. ARTIFACTS: material objects, especially the building itself

C. ACCOUNTS: The stories congregations tell

Language

History

Myths; Worldviews

Symbols, Images, Metaphors

Theologies