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Course: DML802
Topic: LE1 – Church Immersion Experience
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I (along with Kyle and Celine) visited Church of the City NY on January 12, 2020, for its 11am service at its Upper West Side Location (735 West End Ave.) The church's two other locations are the Upper East Side (55 E 59th St., 9:30am Service) and Midtown (120 W 46th St., 4:30pm and 6:30pm Services).

Reflection/Observations:

Power Distance

The leadership philosophy and context of Church of the City NY was primarily low power distance. The atmosphere of the church and dress of the congregants ranged from smart casual to business casual. There was no discernible difference in appearance between the service leaders and attendees. The church's low power distance context is consistent with the United States' PDI value of 40, ranking it 59-61 out of 76 countries.¹ The sermon was well crafted and delivered, as Jon Tyson (Lead Pastor) challenged his listeners to move from a worldly ambition to holy ambition. He referenced the lives of Frances Schaefer, William Carey, Rosa Parks and Nehemiah 1:1-4 along, coming across as an intellectual communicating with those on par with him. There was a clear lack of positional titles (i.e. Pastor, Rev.) used throughout the service. Jon even preached from the floor, about four feet away from the first row, signalling his identification with the rest of the church. In referencing the life of Nehemiah, Jon remarked that he was a normal man positioned by God to do something great. He also shared his personal struggles about friends moving to the suburbs and getting a pool in the backyard and how he occasionally dreamed of such a life. He then heard the Lord say to him, "Let the dead bury the dead. You, come and follow me!"

The leadership's emphasis on sound, biblical teaching and its desire for the whole congregation to embrace its vision is a clear indication of the church's low power distance. This is supported by Plueddemann's observation that countries (such as the United States) most influenced by the two tenets of Reformation (authority of Scripture and priesthood of all believers) are some of the lowest power distance.² The congregation was overwhelmingly Caucasian, millennial, well-dressed, well-educated, and between middle to upper-middle class. Its low power distance is also consistent with Hofstede's comment that "small-power-distance countries spend a relatively larger part of their education budget on secondary schools for everybody, contributing to the development of middle strata in society."³

I agree with Plueddemann that while the Scriptures make room for flexibility with regards to power distance in leadership style, its teaching on leadership attitudes is clear; that leaders are to

¹ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, Third Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010), 59. Kindle edition.

² James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 98. Kindle edition.

³ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations*, 70.

be humble, advance the interests of others, and discerning of their own motivations.⁴ I believe this was demonstrated by Jon and other leaders during the service, either through the sermon, or various other announcements encouraging the congregation to engage in prayer initiatives for city-wide revival and the Generosity Campaign. The church's discipleship values of Gospel, Identity, Community, Mission and Power are also clearly other-centered.⁵

Individualism/Collectivism

The congregation of the church operates within a highly individualistic worldview. This is consistent with Hofstede's statement that the two dimensions of power distance and individualism/collectivism tend to be negatively correlated.⁶ The individualistic mindset of the congregation, located in New York city, is also consistent with the United States' Individualism Index Value (IDV) of 91, ranking it 1st out of 76 countries.⁷

There were several factors of the church service that characterised the individualistic nature of the people. Not one person greeted Kyle, Celine or me, from the time we arrived, until our departure. Although there was a coffee station, it was self-serve. A significant portion of worship lyrics centered on the self, such as "You satisfy my heart every time I'm with You," and "Every time I leave You I never leave empty." These are all in line with Hofstede's findings that for individualists, consumption patterns illustrate a lifestyle supported by the self and words centered on the self (I, me, my) are encouraged.⁸

Given the individualistic mindset of the congregation in general, it was nonetheless refreshing to notice the church's leaders exerting their influence to move the people towards a more collective worldview. They announced the formation of a "Pray Together" campaign, the congregation was invited to stand and participate in the Generosity Liturgy (i.e. the offering), Jon challenged his hearers to adopt a collective/group identity, and the church's vision is "practicing the way of Jesus to bring spiritual, social, and cultural renewal to New York City"⁹ through its prayer and infrastructure initiatives.

The location of the church, along with the age, appearance, and ethnicity (Caucasian) of its people would render most of its attenders to be middle to upper-middle class. A total of 1,500 people attend its three sites. When Jon provided an update on the "End of Year Together Campaign", he remarked that only 150 people (10% of attendees) had participated in pledging \$200K of the needed \$400K. While it is encouraging to note that only 10% of the attendees were able to pledge 50% of the campaign's target, it was disheartening (yet not surprising) to hear that 90% had passed on the opportunity to engage in a collective effort to impact their city. Clearly, the leadership's desire to move its people towards a more collective mindset is swimming against a massive current of the prevailing culture. Hofstede notes that "most Americans feel that

⁴ Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures*, 102.

⁵ Church of the City New York, "Vision," *Church of the City New York*, 09/03/2020, <https://church.nyc/vision>

⁶ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations*, 102-103.

⁷ Ibid, 97.

⁸ Ibid, 117.

⁹ Church of the City New York, "Vision," *Church of the City New York*, 09/03/2020, <https://church.nyc/vision>

individualism is good and that it is at the root of their country's greatness."¹⁰ His research also discovered that as national wealth increases, so does individualism.¹¹

I do not believe the extent of individualism in this church reflects the heart of Christ. There are ample scriptures (i.e. John 15:13, Rom. 12:3-21, 1 Cor. 12) that support a more collective worldview than the one I witnessed throughout this service. However, the extent of individualism I observed isn't exclusive to this church. My experience has been that most Western churches trend towards individualism. Yet, it was encouraging to note that the church's leadership was exercising its influence and authority to champion its collective vision and values, however counter-cultural they may seem.

Masculinity/Femininity

While the church seemed consistent with the national values on its PDI and IDV scores, it would seem to deviate from the national score on the Masculinity Index (MAS). The MAS value for the United States is 62, ranking it 19 out of 76 countries, and rendering the country's culture fairly masculine.¹² The general church atmosphere, however, was very feminine, including the leadership. At first glance, the leadership and congregation of the church was approximately 70% female. Further examination of its staff on its website would confirm that 10 out of 14 staff (71.4%) are female.¹³

Of the five young families I observed, the fathers played a very active role in caring for the children. The fathers were the ones either pushing the strollers or carrying the infant children. It would also seem that both parents in these families held professional employment. Hofstede notes that in feminine cultures, men and women equally share work and home responsibilities.¹⁴

The worship, led by two millennial males, was very emotive and vulnerable, with them commenting "we all have anxieties, we're all tired and struggling." The vulnerable worship language that would characterize the feminine nature of the church included "*You satisfy my heart every time you walk into the room*" and "*Here's my heart Lord speak what is true.*" According to Hofstede, "masculine cultures worship a tough God or gods who justify tough behavior toward fellow humans; feminine cultures worship a tender God or gods who demand caring behavior toward fellow humans."¹⁵

Recommendations

1. During the service, the Lead Pastor announced that they were running out of space and were in the process of securing another location that could accommodate their growing congregation. Recognizing the homogeneity of the congregation (over 90% white), their status in society, and their individualistic mindset, perhaps the leadership should consider a location within a more multi-cultural section of the city. The latest American Census Survey

¹⁰ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations*, 127.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 134.

¹² *Ibid*, 143.

¹³ Church of the City New York, "Team," *Church of the City New York*, 09/03/2020, <https://church.nyc/team>

¹⁴ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations*, 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 175-176.

(ACS) revealed that only 42.67% of New York City is white.¹⁶ The church has a vision for the spiritual, social, and cultural renewal of New York City. As such, it would be consistent to secure a location that represents and is accessible to the spiritual, social and cultural classes of the whole city. I also noticed that over 90% (13 out of 14) of staff listed on the website are white.¹⁷ Church leadership should perhaps also consider diversifying their hiring if their vision is for the renewal of the whole city.

2. The fact that only 10% of the largely millennial congregation had participated in giving to the “End of Year Together Campaign” may be indicative of more than just the individualistic nature of the congregation. My personal interactions with millennials reveal that they will invest time and finances into causes that make a difference in the lives of those less resourced. These causes need a compelling narrative that millennials can relate to and simple enough to transfer to their social and digital networks. They also need to be less institutionally related and more relationally rooted. I would suggest that church leadership pivot their fundraising campaign towards the difference it would make in the lives of ordinary New Yorkers, spiritually, socially, culturally. My short walk around Manhattan revealed some deep social and cultural inequalities. To engage its millennials, church leadership could consider how its fundraising campaign will address the narrative of New York’s social and cultural brokenness and play a part in its healing and redemption.
3. While the sermon challenged the congregation to adopt a collective mindset and was more future-oriented, the worship music/lyrics of the service were predominantly individualistic and short-term oriented. The singing was focused on the struggles of the worshippers and God providing for their present, pressing needs. Music and lyrics engage the heart and mind in ways not possible through speaking or preaching. Rather than music/lyrics that focus on the self and present, worship leaders could also consider an increasing repertoire that affirms life in community, hope for the future, and the redemptive role of the church in the world.

With regards to my D.Min dissertation, I am exploring factors that lead Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) in a certain country of the Middle East to form, remain, and reproduce faith communities. Initial interviews with three MBBs so far have revealed that their respect for elders and pastors (high PD) and their dependence on the greater MBB community for survival (high collectivism) have contributed to healthy, indigenous fellowships. These are in stark contrast to Church of the City NY. However, it would seem that the main reasons that the people of Church of the City NY attend would be its sound, biblical teaching, and the sense of community it fosters among those of their own, even within the individualistic mindset. These are similar to the factors that are growing the MBB fellowships I am examining, including their emphasis on mission. In the final analysis, perhaps there is more that unites than separates the growing body of Christ around the world: the centrality of the Scriptures, the need to gather, and the call scatter to the ends of the earth.

¹⁶ World Population Review, “States, New York Population,” *World Population Review*, 09/03/2020, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/new-york-population/>

¹⁷ Church of the City New York, “Team,” *Church of the City New York*, 09/03/2020, <https://church.nyc/team>

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