

# Church Culture and Mental Health

Building Congregations That Support Well-Being

# A Call to Discipleship

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides [*paidagōgos*] in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. -1 Corinthians 4:14-16 (ESV)

# My Story of Movement

- Wall Street to Pastoral Ministry
- Korean church to Multiethnic church
- Identity: Expectations vs. Reality
  - Marriage, ministry, family
- Rediscovering faith and health post-rupture

# Why a Healthy Congregation Matters

- Mental and spiritual health are deeply connected
- Leadership culture shapes congregational health
- Leaders create pathways for healing and restoration
- Cultivate faithfulness over popularity or platform

# Spiritual Discernment

- Reliance on the Holy Spirit

# Skill #1: Cultural Exegesis

- Understand context before drawing conclusions
- Study your city: stress, values, motivations
- Study your church: why do people actually come

# Leadership Context Assessment

- Everything rises and falls on leadership
  - Decision makers (LP, Elders, Staff)
  - Doers (Staff, Volunteers)
- Team vs Solo leadership dynamics:
  - Team: collective buy-in but slower actions
  - Solo: quicker action but less buy-in
- Culture flows downward

# Skill #2: Identify Staff Culture

- Psychological safety is foundational
  - Honest conversations vs Parking Lot conversations
- Shared language
- Informal norms
  - Do people gather or scatter in crisis?
  - Can the staff banter with the lead pastor?

# Defining Culture

- Culture = shared behaviors over time

# Defining Church Culture

- Church Culture = Informal behaviors + Formal theology
- Leaders model, reinforce, reward
- Values become visible through actions

# Key Cultural Values

- Integrity: same on the pulpit and off
- Transparency: handling rupture/pain honestly
- Accountability: evaluate everything

# Skill #3: Develop Healthy Lead Pastor Responsibilities

- How do you know you're healthy? What triggers you?
- Develop a theology of mental health
- Live out Sabbath
- Care for family over ministry success
- Care for community beyond the church

# Healthy Lead Pastor Practices

- Normalize conversations about mental health in your largest group setting
- Model vulnerability from the platform
  - Share stories of loss and grief without victory
  - Don't be the hero



# Skill #4: Develop a Healthy Second-in-Command Relationship

- Not competition, but complement
- Support strengths, fill in gaps
- Protect unity in leadership

# Skill #5: Create Healthy Organizational Policies

- Clear but not rigid policies: PTO, sabbaticals, job descriptions that are accurate
  - Do not create a policy because of bad apples
- Fair total compensation matters
- Healthy environments produce healthy people

# Staff Culture Indicators

- Laughter and relationships
- Low 'grumpy factor'
- Safe honesty without fear

# Skill #6: Volunteer Culture

- Disciple volunteers, stop using them
- Intentional vs. Accidental
- Invest in growth and development
  - What % of your ministry budget is allocated for volunteer development?
- Create clear on-ramps and off-ramps

# Q&A

# Discussion Questions

# Culture Reality Check

If someone observed your church for a month, what would they say your actual culture is based on behaviors, not values you claim?

# Psychological Safety

- Where in your leadership (staff, board, volunteers) do people feel safe to be honest?
- Where might “parking lot conversations” be happening instead?

# Leadership Influence

- What behaviors are you currently modeling, reinforcing, or rewarding as a leader?
- What kind of culture are those behaviors unintentionally creating?

# Crisis Response

- Think about the last time your church faced a challenge or crisis:
  - Did your people tend to fracture or support, and what does that reveal about your culture?

# Practical Next Step

- What is one specific change you can make in the next 30 days (in meetings, sermons, policies, or volunteer development) that would move your church toward greater mental and emotional well-being?

# Contact

Feel free to contact me with any questions:

Alex Chang

[achang@princetonalliance.org](mailto:achang@princetonalliance.org)