

Working Class Culture

Notes for a presentation

No categorization works in all cases. One can always find exceptions to the rules. In particular, race and culture can make a difference in global generalizations. These caveats then lead us into the following basic understanding of working class culture.

1. Being poor is hard work. People are struggling to survive. Life is generally seen as a struggle which then means it often leads to blame and cause placed upon another (e.g., immigrants, supervisor) for the struggle's existence. This can make it difficult for working people to endorse or accept the theological principle of grace or the idea that all things are created good.
2. Working class people seldom have 'extra' resources, either money or time. Wages are low and work hours are long. Thus support for a ministry must be found in other ways.
3. Work schedules change frequently with the worker having no control over the work scheduling. This makes it difficult to plan ministry events.
4. Working class tend to live in the 'now', rather than in the future. Getting by day by day is often a struggle and hard work taking up a great portion of the day. There simply is seldom time to think beyond the day. This "now" orientation can make ministry planning difficult
5. Working class people tend to depend more on families than other economic classes. With no "extra" funds there is no chance to use day care, housecleaning services. Thus, families are used for family support issues. This makes for a wariness in pastoral care that refers people to 'outside' services.
6. There is an emphasis on children, especially children's education, in the hope that the children can improve their lives.
7. Communication is face to face, to the point, even blunt sometimes. It is often impassioned, makes its point, then forgives and moves on with little animosity. They depend on truth and dislike ambiguity.
8. Working class people often feel that life is out of control, 'others' are controlling their lives and they are simply pawns in the game. They often like any sense of control in their lives and often turn to church to find that one place where they can have some control. The importance and passion for control in the church can lead to animosity when their control is challenged in the church because it is the only place they do have control. Generally, most people do not like to give up control/power voluntarily.
9. Low income workers are generally very wary of institutions. Institutions generally "do things to them" – make decisions for them, humiliate them at work, etc. They usually do things for them rather than with them.
10. Working class culture depends more on oral culture than written/print culture. This has obvious implications for ministry.

11. Culture and media tends to teach poor and working people they are failures by constantly providing images and stories of how rich people and those that accumulate goods are successful. Contrary images of being God's children regardless of wealth or accumulation of goods can be very helpful.
12. Low income people tend to trust experience over knowledge. Knowledge is often associated with the higher classes and thus often questioned as a means of control. Likewise, working class people's lack of educational opportunity makes it difficult to understand the ways knowledge is often expressed – written text.
13. Work often demeans them – no control, unsafe conditions, verbal abuse, etc. This can lead to a loss of dignity and a sense of humanity.

The Church and the Working Class

1. 'Fancy' theological language often seems to working class people as a foreign language (as it does for many others). This, the use of less formal and academic language is important.
2. Many working class people appreciate clear and defined ideas. This relates to their appreciation of direct language devoid of ambiguity. Amidst their sense of lacking control faith words and images are better appreciated when they are direct and to the point with assured promises.
3. Church is not a program. Church tends to be built on relationships, networks and a sense of community. Church is seen as an extension of their family/community network.
4. Church is more family than organization or institution. Goal orientation is less important than being oriented to gatherings and community. Relationships, not events or programs, are important.
5. Low income people like to be treated as human beings, not as souls/people to be saved. They appreciate, given their lack of control in other parts of their lives, being recognized what they have to offer and teach. They want God's presence recognized in their lives as opposed as seeing their class as devoid of God's presence and needed to be saved.

Working Class and Belief

Variety of categories

1. Why God allow this harsh poverty to exist.
2. Evil is stronger than Good. Life often seen as a battleground between Satan and God and Satan may be winning.
3. Stuff happens. What are you going to do?
4. There is no God. Just look around, see the poverty, how can God exist?