Group M: Families in Motion

Younger working-class families earning moderate incomes in smaller residential communities

Resource: Mosaic by Experian.

Religious Experience In a Nutshell

Religious perspective: God, Family, and Country

Common Spiritual Issues: Feelings of estrangement, anxieties about emptiness and displacement

Potential Influence

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General Comments:

Families in Motion are quite religious. They not only attend church regularly, but they often follow spiritual practices of table grace and families may read the Bible and pray together. They gravitate to relatively conservative, but not necessarily extreme churches. They may be indifferent to hot button issues in society and have a “live and let live” attitude. However, their growing anxieties are such that they may become more politically involved around particular issues.

Their quest for God is often motivated by feelings of estrangement. Partly this is because many have moved (or been forced to move for economic survival) from rural to more urbanized environments, and from farming to construction, transportation, or other careers. And partly this is because they feel that American culture is becoming too diverse and undermining a traditional agrarian way of life. Separated from more familiar meaningful symbols, their faith helps overcome a sense of emptiness in their lives.

Experian suggests that Families in Motion live in small cities and towns that have managed to prosper even though they are neither industrial centers nor high tech boomtowns. These tend to be blue collar, working households with three or more children. They tend to be mainstream conservative (independent, patriotic, and family centered). Some have opted for military careers. They engage the church through family, and they engage the community through church.

Church participation provides continuity with their roots and programs that reinforce their traditional values. Churches tend to be family centered, with special emphasis on day care, toddlers, and early
elementary education. The church may sponsor a private Christian school, or encourage Christian home schooling (although both parents are often working to make ends meet).

The size of a church may not matter too much, although larger churches usually offer more resources for family activities. Intimacy comes from the extended family, networks of friends, and small groups sponsored by the church, so it really isn't necessary to know every member's name. Segments in this group are not highly involved in civic organizations, and may not contribute to many charitable causes.

*Families in Motion* perceive themselves as committed Christians, but they may not conform to traditional ecclesiastical norms. Connection to a denomination may or may not be important. People value familiar routines in worship and traditional, Biblically based curricula for education and small groups, but they don't like an absentee hierarchy telling them what to think or imposing clergy leadership without their participation and consent. Regardless of the legal trusteeship of a church property, they always think the members own it.

The credibility of spiritual leadership is more important than educations, ordinations, certifications, and office holding. Clergy should hold themselves and each other accountable to “walk the talk” as they “talk the walk”. They dislike theological and moral ambiguities, and want religion to be practical, useful, and relevant to daily life. They can be very resilient to natural disasters and unexplainable evil, and are often able to overcome adversity with dogged and optimistic faith. They usually believe that every Christian has a calling or purpose in life, but they may need help to discern what it is for themselves.

Their social ideals tend to be more “black and white” than their actual behavior. They prefer to take people and situations on a “case by case” basis with a natural disposition for compassion. Assurance of salvation is important, and they may struggle to reconcile conflicting images of God as “Compassionate Father” and “Righteous Judge”. Different people, in different contexts, may focus primarily on one or the other. It depends on the situation and the personal relationships at stake.

The church really is a microcosm of their community and an extension of their family. The Old Testament story of Ruth probably captures much of what they value about church and faith. They, too, take long genealogical lists seriously. They honor their grandparents and great grandparents, and they prioritize their children and future grandchildren, and shape their self-esteem around shared patterns of personal history. They are committed to fairly traditional gender and parenting roles, and are open to accept a “foreigner” marrying into the family. They work hard in fields or factories, and are optimistic about prosperity.

*Families in Motion* often like “praise choruses” in worship. The heart of their religion might be summed up by the blessing on Boaz, Ruth, and their newborn child: "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him” (Ruth 4:14-15 NRSV). This child, like his parents, is part of a salvation history that extends from Abraham, through David, to Jesus.