

# CHURCH HEALTH ASSESSMENT

## The Northwest Conference

### 2007

The Northwest Conference is committed to assisting the local church in fulfilling its unique mission within the larger body of Christ. The following questions are designed to assist each church in assessing the relative health and vitality of ministry within the local setting.

You are encouraged to evaluate your ministry by having local church leadership discuss the following questions. You are then encouraged to use this as a discussion tool among your leaders. *This is not intended to be an exhaustive assessment tool.* However, it may serve as a preliminary reflection of the present vitality of your local church.

The following questions are informally centered on the *Eight Key Characteristics* contained within the Natural Church Development process. These characteristics include:

1. **Empowering Leadership**
2. **Gift-oriented Ministry**
3. **Passionate Spirituality**
4. **Functional Structures**
5. **Inspiring Worship Service**
6. **Holistic Small Groups**
7. **Need-oriented Evangelism**
8. **Loving Relationships**

#### **The eight quality characteristics of NCD**

#### **Empowering Leadership**

Effective leadership begins with an intimate relationship with God, resulting in Christ-like character and a clear sense of God's calling for leader's lives. As this base of spiritual maturity increases, effective pastors and leaders multiply, guide, empower and equip disciples to realize their full potential in Christ and work together to accomplish God's vision

1. In what ways are leaders accountable to other leaders
2. How do we identify emerging leaders?
3. How do the assignments our leaders have in the church fit their gifts, abilities and personalities?
4. To what extent does the vision of the church match the vision and call of the leadership?
5. How are lay people involved in the worship service and other ministries of the church? How are innovative ideas received?

6. How do leaders collaborate?
7. How have our leaders made known their conviction that God wants the church to grow?
8. What avenues are available for sharing vision with the congregation and how are they being used?

### **Gift-oriented Ministry**

The Holy Spirit is sovereign in giving to every Christian spiritual gift(s) for the building of God's kingdom. Church leaders have the responsibility to help believers discover, develop and exercise their gifts in appropriate ministries so that the Body of Christ "grows and builds itself up in love."

1. Do we help people identify their gifts?
2. How and when have we taught on spiritual gifts?
3. How do we communicate that God uses each person's task to build our church?
4. How and when do we affirm people in their ministry?
5. Once somebody steps into a ministry role, what intentional coaching/mentoring is available for that role?
6. How do we encourage our gifted people to work on teams together?
7. What training opportunities do we make available?
8. What system do we employ to make gift discovery an ongoing event at our church?

### **Passionate Spirituality**

Effective ministry flows out of a passionate spirituality. Spiritual intimacy leads to a strong conviction that God will act in powerful ways. A godly vision can only be accomplished through an optimistic faith that views obstacles as opportunities and turns defeats into victories.

1. How are church members integrating their faith into all areas of their life?
2. What recent examples have we heard of God's transforming work in church members' lives?
3. What are the marks of a person who is enthusiastic about our church?
4. What are we doing to teach God's desires for our church's future?
5. In what ways do we see personal and corporate prayer empowering the ministries of our church?
6. What opportunities do we provide for people to learn how to use the Bible as a guidebook?
7. How is our experience of God naturally reflected in our conversations with others?
8. How do we inform people of prayer needs?

## **Functional Structures**

The Church is the living Body of Christ. Like all healthy organisms, it requires numerous systems which work together to fulfill its intended purpose. Each must be evaluated regularly to determine if it is still the best way to accomplish the intended purpose.

1. What have we done in the past year to help people connect with our goals and support the plan?
2. How do we ensure that church activities are well planned and organized?
3. In what ways does each ministry, program and system connect to accomplish our goals?
4. How well do people understand the organizational structure of the church?
5. In what ways do we give leaders the freedom to develop new ministries?
6. How do we encourage creativity in people's thinking about how they participate in church life?
7. In what ways are leaders encouraged and expected to mentor others for personal and leadership development?
8. To what extent is the concept of apprenticing understood and practiced in the ministries of our church?

## **Inspiring Worship Services**

Inspiring worship is a personal and corporate encounter with the living God. Both personal and corporate worship must be infused with the presence of God resulting in times of joyous exultation and times of quiet reverence. Inspiring worship is not driven by a particular style or ministry focus group, but rather the shared experience of God's awesome presence.

1. What are the indicators to us that people who come to our worship service(s) have the sense of connecting with God during that time?
2. How are we assessing the inspirational impact of our services?
3. How have we helped church members become aware of newcomers and visitors?
4. How do you encourage or invite new people to do more than come for the worship service?
5. What are the indicators to us that people look forward to coming to church?
6. How are small group activities linked to the worship service?
7. In what ways are the sermons practical and helpful in living everyday life?
8. What interactive opportunities are given for people to respond to the sermon?

## **Holistic Small Groups**

Holistic small groups are disciple-making communities that endeavor to reach the unchurched, meet individual needs, develop each person according to their God-given gifts and raise leaders to sustain the growth of the church. Like healthy body cells, holistic small groups are designed to grow and multiply.

1. To what extent is scripture and prayer an integral part of small group life?
2. How transparent are people with each other about significant things in their lives?
3. What process do we have for training, apprenticing and coaching small group leaders?
4. What opportunities are given for people to use their gifts in small group?
5. How do our small groups make new people feel welcome?
6. What kind of follow-up is done when someone visits a group?
7. Who chooses topics of discussion and to what extent are they relevant to group members?
8. In what ways are group members interacting between meetings?

### **Need-oriented Evangelism**

Need-oriented evangelism intentionally cultivates relationships with pre-Christian people so they can become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who are actively participating within the life of the church and community. Using appropriate ministries and authentic relationships, believers can guide others into the family of God.

1. How do we work with church members to approach new people with openness and acceptance?
2. How easy is it for new people to develop significant relationships with people in the church? How and where does that happen?
3. How do we work with new Christians to establish them in their faith?
4. How has our church identified needs in our community?
5. In what ways do our members have consistent contact with un-churched people?
6. How do people discover their personal style of evangelism?
7. How enthusiastic are people in our church to invite their un-churched friends to our church activities?
8. What creative and effective outreach efforts have we experienced through our church?

### **Loving Relationships**

Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing church. Jesus said people would know we are his disciples by our love. Practical demonstration of love builds authentic Christian community and brings others into God's kingdom.

1. What evidence do we have that praise and compliments strongly influence the atmosphere of our church?
2. When and how is public recognition given?
3. When and how often do we experience laughter at church gatherings?
4. How accepting are we of people who are different than we are?
5. What arenas do we have that encourage people to build relationships that are more than just casual acquaintances?
6. What training do we have that helps people grow in healthy relationships?

7. Where and when are we providing general guidance to our people about how to enter a conflict resolution process?
8. When two individuals in the church have faced conflict, what process was used to resolve it?

**Natural Church Development (NCD)** is a church health assessment process through which a church seeks to determine its strengths and weaknesses; its level of health in eight primary areas of church life. It further assists a church in addressing its greatest needs with the goal of the implementation of a strategic plan to improve in areas of need.

The eight characteristics identified above are evaluated in order to identify the effectiveness of each in the local church setting. The degree to which these are present and in operation directly correlates to the health (or lack of it) of the church.

NCD has been used in sixty countries on six continents. It has involved thousands of churches and millions of survey respondents. The creator of NCD is Christian Schwarz from Germany.

He identifies the following as being pivotal points in the NCD process:

1. All churches are different and therefore must take basic principles and apply them to each local setting. It is not particularly effective to try to imitate another church. Rather, it is better to identify the principle behind what is taking place, and then contextualize it for each specific locale.
2. Churches are organic in nature, not simply organizational. Therefore, leaders must learn to “tend” to the church. This involves evaluation and caring interplay between the various parts, knowing that each part affects the whole.
3. As leaders *and* followers, we have a part to play in the health and growth of our church. God has a part to play. We seek to remove obstacles to health and growth. We also plant and water, knowing that it is God who causes the growth.
4. The key concern must be the quality of a church, rather than simply its numeric growth (i.e. quantity). However, Christian Schwarz does believe that qualitative growth tends to promote quantitative growth in time.
5. The crucial aspect of the *Eight Key Characteristics* listed above is the adjectives (i.e. Empowering, Passionate, Inspiring, etc).

6. No Key Characteristic can be missing. If a church is strong in all of the areas but one, the one area of weakness (known as the “Minimum Factor”) will be the point of vulnerability and ineffectiveness. Schwarz invites us to picture a barrel with each of the *Eight Quality Characteristics* being a vertical stave. What happens if all of the staves are the same length, but one is significantly shorter? If you pour water into the barrel, the water will run out at the point of the shortest stave. This is the idea behind the need of a church to identify and address its Minimum Factor...its shortest stave.
7. NCD is a process that involves hard work. It also takes time. It is not a magic formula meant to bring instant health and happiness to churches that are in severe crisis. It is most effective in churches that have the capacity to adapt and implement for the sake of future ministry. It does not solve all of life’s problems...rather it seeks to provide a common language and structure to better facilitate new direction and purpose.

If you would like to find out more about the formal Natural Church Development process, please contact Associate Superintendent, Mark Stromberg at the Conference office.

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