

Understanding Natural Church Development

The Principles of NCD

An understanding of what makes churches grow, whether explicitly or intuitively, is necessary to see growth take place. Too often we look to models or programmes of “success” in other churches and try to replicate them, but to no avail. Each church is unique so programmes and models cannot be successfully imposed or transplanted.

The German theologian, Christian Schwarz, recognised this reality and sought to answer the question—are there any principles present in all healthy growing churches that **are** transferable? To find answers he looked to the bible and to nature and undertook extensive empirical research.

The bible contains several passages which give us some clues about how churches grow: *The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed... the seed sprouts and grows ... **all by itself** the soil produces grain ...as soon as the grain is ripe he puts the sickle to it.* **Mark 4:26-29**

*They devoted themselves to ... and **the Lord added** to their number daily those who were being saved.* **Acts 2:42-47**



*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but **God made it grow.** 1 Cor 3:6*

The bible teaches that we have a part to play but **God** is responsible for the growth.



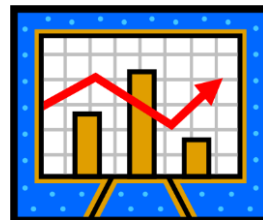
When we look at nature we see how God has made his creation to operate and we can draw similar conclusions. Every organism has “all-by-itself” growth potential. Organisms grow, thrive & multiply when the environment is right!

Schwarz also identifies **Six Growth Forces** that describe how nature works. Understanding these can improve our decision making e.g. to ensure a new work is sustainable and can multiply as needed.

Six Growth Forces

*Interdependence
Multiplication
Energy Transformation
Sustainability
Symbiosis
Fruitfulness*

Whilst growth is God-given and happens “all by itself” we have a responsibility to create the right environment in which growth can take place. Hence the name “**Natural Church Development**”.



When it came to undertaking empirical research Schwarz established a research project of 1,000 churches, in 32 countries, on 5 continents and in 18

languages. He was keen to establish as wide a research base as possible of churches of different sizes, denominations, cultures and settings in order to identify if there were common factors applicable everywhere.

The result of this research was the identification of **8 Quality Characteristics** (see separate leaflet for definitions)

The 8 Essential Qualities

*Empowering Leadership
Gift-based Ministry
Passionate Spirituality
Effective Structures
Inspiring Worship
Holistic Small Groups
Need-oriented Evangelism
Loving Relationships*

present in all healthy growing churches of every description—hence his application of the epithet “essential” to them. The research has now extended to over 82,000 churches worldwide.

Several Anglican dioceses around the world, including in the UK, and other denominations, have strategies encouraging their churches to develop these 8 Quality Characteristics and so to create the environment in which growth can take place “all by itself”.

The Processes of NCD

The principles of NCD outlined above are universally applicable. *Healthy Church Matters* helps churches as they seek to apply these principles using the NCD tools.

A regular and accurate assessment of the quality characteristics of a church are critical to this, and to good planning.

The wisdom of an outsider to help in this process is invaluable. *Healthy Church Matters* encourages churches to use the NCD survey every year or so, and we provide advice and mentoring services to assist them in this and in applying the results.

The survey is undertaken by core members of the congregation—all of them if less than 30 members, a sample of 30 of them if more! The results of the survey give detailed information about a church's strengths that are to be celebrated, and their not so strong aspects that need to be developed.

Healthy Church Matters assists churches in understanding the results of their survey and an initial telephone/Skype feedback session is included in the cost of the survey.

Further sessions can be organised as required, for a reasonable fee, and we can work with

churches as they decide their priorities for action. We pay particular attention to the weakest quality (the minimum factor) as this is what is currently limiting the health and growth potential of the church.

The survey helps to identify not only the weakest quality but also the reasons why it is the weakest—this enables precise actions to be taken to address the issues identified. As



this is done over a period of time the overall quality of the church improves and God-given growth begins to happen "all by itself" as the right environment is created.

Applying the Principles and Implementing the Process

Healthy Church Matters are here to help you and welcome the opportunity

to talk with denominational leaders, clergy, leadership teams, church councils and whole congregations, about the principles and the processes of NCD outlined in this leaflet, and to discuss how to get started.



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An introduction to Natural Church Development

Creating an Environment for Growth



"all by itself the soil produces grain"

Mark 4:28