

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORK AMONG US

In July 2007 the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) completed a Pastor evaluation and set goals and objectives for the next 12 to 24 months. The goals were: 1) bring enthusiasm back to leaderships and re-inspire the congregation, and 2) address our growing financial concerns.

In November 2007, 13 of the leaders of NUMC attended the E3 (Empower, Equip, Evangelize) Conference sponsored by the School of Congregational Development for the United Methodist Church of New England. There was a growing excitement and enthusiasm from those who attended to "discover God's work among us" and build on NUMC's future.

Our group of 13 grew to 21 members who make up the Discovering God's Work Among Us working group. Meetings began in December 2007 and continued through March 2008. We reviewed our mission statement and reviewed all our programs and activities (30+) and considered how they supported our mission. We began to prioritize our programs and activities to focus our energy over the next 12 to 24 months. We discussed using 3 approaches:

- 1) Implement the Natural Church Development (NCD) process,*
- 2) Hire an outside consultant*
- 3) Continue to work on our own using our own internal resources*

Before we could make a decision on our approach, we wanted to better understand the NCD process.

What is NCD?

Natural Church Development is a process to become a healthier church. NCD is based on biblical principals, researched findings and personal relationships. Millions of Christians have discovered that NCD is about drawing people close to God, helping them experience all that God has in store for them and, as a natural healthy side effect, seeing numerical growth within the church as a whole. More than 50,000 churches in 70 countries have moved into the NCD process.

How does NCD work?

A number of church members are surveyed to measure eight healthy quality characteristics:

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

The results of the survey will show which quality characteristic a church needs to work on first. They will then develop a plan to improve its overall health. After the plan is implemented church members will take the survey again (12 to 18 months after the first survey) to measure their improvement.

We met with members of leadership from Gales Ferry UMC. They have been using the NCD process for about 2 years. It was helpful to get their perspective on the process and hear about their successes.

Pros of the NCD Program

*The process emphasizes balance and allows you to work at a pace that keeps other factors in balance. * The process helps you develop and focus in order to make future decisions. * It is a process that has been tested and has worked in many other places. * We can participate in the NCD process in conjunction with what we are currently doing. * The area of focus comes from the congregation, based on an objective process. * There is a sense of ownership. * NCD can fit with who we are. * It will unleash creativity. * Other churches in the conference can assist us (i.e. Gales Ferry UMC) * It will measure the life of the congregation, not just how to entertain. * It will become a new discipline. * It is okay to let go of things we try that just aren't working.*

Cons of the NCD Program

The process will require a lot of work, time and people.

Many leaders are tired and may be difficult to energize.

Costs

The first year costs to implement the NCD process are estimated to be \$1,500. (\$500 for the survey and the purchase of books for the congregation, and \$1,000 to support the implementation process, i.e. new programs, communication, etc.)

Recommendation

The Discovering Group unanimously voted to recommend to the Admin Council to approve implementing the NCD process. The Admin Council approved implementing NCD and members of the Discovering Group

presented an overview of the NCD process to the congregation on April 6, 2008. At this presentation a booklet, The ABC's of Natural Church Development, was distributed to each family. If you did not receive a booklet, please contact the church office.

We will continue to share updates with you as we continue our journey to discover how God is working among us at NUMC.

Questions Regarding NCD

The following are answers to questions we received from the congregation on April 6th. Please feel free to ask any of the team members listed below questions that you may have. We will continue to post Q&A's on our website and publish in future issues of Tidings.

How did Natural Church Development get started?

Natural Church Development began in the mid-1990's as a research project designed and supervised by Christian Schwarz. Schwarz is a German-born church growth consultant who studied theology in Bochum, Bethel, Wuppertal and Mainz, Germany, and in Pasadena, CA. His work on the theory and practice of church growth has been published in 40 languages.

Schwarz and his original research team surveyed more than 1000 churches in 32 countries with intent to identify "the essential qualities of a healthy, growing church, regardless of culture and theological persuasion." After some 4.2 million responses were processed, the team concluded that church growth is most comparable to the growth of living organisms. That is, when we focus on enriching the environment and on identifying and eliminating obstacles to growth, churches will grow in much the same manner as well-tended plants or gardens grow.

Since the original study's publication in 1996, Schwarz established and nurtured the Institute for Natural Church Development. NCD National Partners now include more than 50,000 churches from 70 countries throughout the world.

Who will review the results of the survey?

Thirty individuals from NUMC will complete the NCD survey. The United States NCD Partner, ChurchSmart Resources, will score our responses and report the results in our congregation's Basic NCD Profile. NUMC's Healthy Church Team, SPRC, Administrative Council and pastor will review our basic profile, share results with the congregation, and guide our plan for enrichment and growth.

What is the minimum factor?

There are eight quality characteristics of growing churches: 1) Empowering Leadership, 2) Gift-Based Ministry, 3) Passionate Spirituality, 4) Effective Structures, 5) Inspiring Worship Service, 6) Holistic Small Groups, 7) Need-Oriented Evangelism, 8) Loving Relationships. It can be demonstrated that the growth of the church is blocked most by those quality characteristics which are least developed. Think of a barrel with 8 sections that make up the sides of the barrel (staves) of varying lengths. Fill the barrel with water. The water will start to leave the barrel at the shortest stave. Now think of the staves as the 8 quality characteristics of a growing church. The church will only be as strong as its shortest stave (or minimum factor). For example, if a churches minimum factor (or shortest stave) is effective structures, then this is where the emphasis should be focused for developing a plan for raising the minimum factor. By raising the minimum factor, we strengthen the overall quality characteristics and success of the church which will lead to natural church growth.

Additional information about NCD International principals, their professional training and experience may be obtained from NCD website: www.ncd-international.org

Discovering God's Work Among Us Work Group

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*(*Attended the E3 Conference)*