

Natural Church Development (NCD)

Background

NCD is a long term process for continuing to grow our church in health and faith.

The process was based on research done by Christian Schwarz who studied theology and is the director of the Institute for Natural Church Development.

From 1994 to 1996 he directed the most comprehensive research project about the causes of church growth that has ever been conducted in the Christian church.

His research verified the link between church health and growth.

This research was the most extensive, statistically valid, worldwide church growth research project ever conducted.

The study examined:

- 1000 different churches on five continents
- 18 languages
- large and small
- churches persecuted by the state and churches financially supported by the state
- well-known churches and totally unknown churches
- churches from areas currently experiencing great spiritual revivals, as well as from regions which appear to be more spiritually developing
- 32 countries
- 4.2 million pieces of data
- growing and declining

The research results confirm what many leaders have known intuitively -- healthy churches are growing churches, making more and better disciples in loving obedience to Christ.

Natural Church Development is a “principle-oriented” approach.

The “principles” are those elements that have been proven to apply to growing churches around the globe.

Eight essential qualities (principles) were identified, which can be measured quantitatively. The key to each of these quality characteristics is the adjective. Listen carefully to the adjective in each of the following characteristics.

- Empowering Leadership
- Gift-based Ministry
- Passionate Spirituality
- Effective Structures

- Inspiring Worship Services
- Holistic Small Groups
- Need-oriented Evangelism
- Loving Relationships

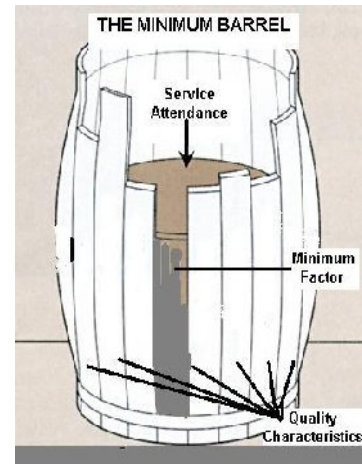
Every church has most or at least some of these characteristics but not all churches emphasize the adjectives at the front of each of these quality characteristics.

No Quality Characteristic Can Be Missing

Three things can be said with a high degree of certainty:

1. These are universally valid qualities.
2. They can be transferred to our own situation.
3. Each of these has a positive relationship with both the quality and the quantitative growth of the church.

No one single factor leads to growth in churches; it is the interplay of the eight elements as they relate to the growth forces.



The “All-by-Itself-Principle”

The secret of growing churches does not consist in pushing or pulling the church in human strength and efforts—but in releasing and developing the potential God himself uses to build his church. Then growth occurs all by itself.

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts, and grows; though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, and then full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come. – Mark 4:26–29

The church is designed by God to grow so growth happens automatically if we remove the obstacles that prevent growth. Growing churches use this growth principle.

The results of the survey will help us identify our strengths as well as our minimum factor.

The Minimum Factor

Imagine a barrel with eight staves, each representing the eight quality characteristics.

Each stave in the barrel only reaches as high as the score of its characteristic.

With this analogy, you can only fill the barrel to the level of the lowest stave (minimum factor). So to increase the capacity of the barrel, we must increase the height of the lowest stave (minimum factor).

Now focusing on the minimum factor does not mean that we don't pay attention to the other seven areas. As stated earlier, all eight characteristics are vitally important to healthy growing churches.

Focusing on the minimum factor helps us to set timely priorities. Since all eight areas can't be worked on with the same amount of energy and concentration, we need to find areas that will yield the greatest long range return on our investments. Remember, minimum factors can change quickly—especially when there is a conscious attempt to improve in this one area.

The NCD Process

Step 1 – Prepare – This step includes getting leadership buy-in, mobilizing intercessors and choosing a Church Health Team. An external coach is beneficial to help a church engage in the NCD process with integrity to see the results maximized. Curtis Brown has agreed to be our coach.

Step 2 – Diagnose – Analyze the health of our church. This step begins with 30 members of our church taking the survey followed by an in-depth analysis of our Minimum Factor. It concludes with identifying 3–5 key issues to address. During the month of August, we will be holding small group meetings to share the result (minimum factor) and increase our health by getting your input to identify what is working, what is not working and what recommendation you have to improve our minimum factor.

The criteria we used for selecting survey takers included:

- 1) regularly attend worship service
- 2) participate in small groups or committees
- 3) understand the culture of our church

Eighty-three names were identified (we are truly blessed to have so many people actively involved in our church). Thirty names were randomly selected. Thirty is the number that the NCD program developers have established for collecting the appropriate sample size. Thirty is used no matter how many members a church has.

Step 3 – Plan – Plan to address our minimum factor. In this step the Church health team will develop a strategic plan to address our 3–5 key issues identified in Step 2. This meeting with the Health Team and Curtis Brown (our coach) is planned for early September. We will validate our plan with members of the congregation.

Step 4 – Implement – Implement the strategic plan developed in Step 3. Staying focused on carrying out the plan and overcoming obstacles along the way will be the task of the church Health Team.

Step 5 – Evaluate – Evaluate the process we used and the results of our effort. Use the growth forces to determine increased health in our minimum factor then plan to re-take the survey (12 to 15 months from now).

The Health Team commits to communicate with all of you every step of the way.

Isaiah 41:13 *“For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”*

The “ABC Booklet” of Natural Church Development is available at the church for anyone wishing more detail, and the Health Team welcomes questions and feedback from all.

Health Team Members

Marlene Camper, Jim Glass, Rev. Margaret Goad, Vickie Hadge, Jane Hopkins, Tim McLaughlin, Kris Pelletier, and Deb Tedford (Team Leader)