

Overview of NCD
based on *Natural Church Development* by Christian Schwarz
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Critics of the church growth movement have often emphasized the need for quality congregations. "Don't focus on numerical growth, concentrate on qualitative growth." Christian Schwarz agrees wholeheartedly!

Through careful research, Christian Schwarz has verified the link between church health and growth. Having worked among German churches for a number of years, he has broadened his studies to include churches from around the world. There has never been such an extensive, statistically valid, worldwide church growth research project ever conducted.

The study examined 1,000 churches in 32 countries from 5 continents. A total of 4.2 million pieces of data were collected and thoroughly analyzed, using approved methods from social science. The research followed stringent scientific procedures assuring the accuracy of the results. Christoph Schalk's thesis at the University of Wuerzburg demonstrated the reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

- Reliability = the consistency of the results, i.e. you get the same results if you repeated the survey
- Validity = the relevance of the results, i.e. the survey measures what it's supposed to be measuring

What was studied?

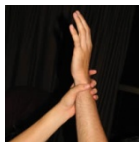
- 1000 different churches on five continents
- 32 countries
- 18 languages
- 4.2 million pieces of data
- large and small
- growing and declining
- churches persecuted by the state and churches financially supported by the state
- well-known churches and totally unknown churches
- churches from areas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

The result: 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 (NCD) is a "principle-oriented" approach. "Models" are concepts that one or sometimes many churches in some part of the world have experienced positively. But imitating these experiences may not be the right answer for churches in other situations. On the other hand, "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.

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

The key in each of these quality characteristics is the *adjective*, which can be considered a summary of the six growth forces as they apply to that characteristic: empowering, gift-oriented, passionate, functional, etc. Every church has some sort of leadership or worship or structure. Not all emphasize the adjectives at the front of each of these quality characteristics. Here are some brief definitions:



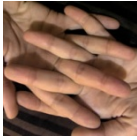
Empowering Leadership: Effective leadership begins with an intimate relationship with God, resulting in Christ-like character and a clear sense of God's calling for leader's lives. As this base of spiritual maturity increases, effective pastors and leaders multiply, guide, empower and equip disciples to realize their full potential in Christ and work together to accomplish God's vision. Leaders consider it as one of their most important tasks to help Christians develop greater degrees of empowerment. They equip, support, motivate, mentor and coach individuals to become all that God wants them to be.



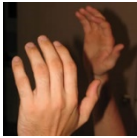
Gift-oriented Ministry: The Holy Spirit sovereignly gives to every Christian spiritual gift(s) for the building of God's kingdom. Church leaders have the responsibility to help believers discover, develop and exercise their gifts in appropriate ministries so that the Body of Christ "grows and builds itself up in love." The role of church leadership is to help its members identify their gifts and integrate them into ministries that match their gifts. When a person lives according to their spiritual giftedness, they are no longer working in their own strength, but the Holy Spirit works in them. Studies show that most Christians are either not involved in ministry or they function in a ministry that does not match their gifts.



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. The important issue here is not the way spirituality is expressed, but the fact that faith is actually lived out with commitment, fire and enthusiasm. The methods a church used are really a secondary concern. A church that lives its faith with passionate fervor will experience success with many a method.



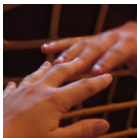
Effective Structures: The Church is the living Body of Christ. Like all healthy organisms, it requires numerous systems that work together to fulfill its intended purpose. Each must be evaluated regularly to determine if it is still the best way to accomplish the intended purpose. The most important criterion for forms and structures in the church is if they fulfill their purpose or not. Church structures are never an end in themselves but always only a means to an end.



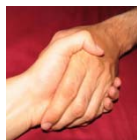
Inspiring Worship Services: Inspiring worship is a personal and corporate encounter with the living God. Both personal and corporate worship must be infused with the presence of God resulting in times of joyous exultation and times of quiet reverence. Inspiring worship is not driven by a particular style or ministry focus group — but rather the shared experience of God’s awesome presence. Is the worship service an inspiring experience for those who attend? It is not whether our services target Christians or non-Christians, whether they celebrate “in the language of Canaan” or in a more secular language, or whether we worship using a liturgical or a more free-flowing approach.



Holistic Small Groups: Holistic small groups are disciple-making communities which 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. Growing churches have developed a system of small groups where individual Christians can find intimate community, practical help and intensive spiritual interaction. In the groups, not only is the biblical text discussed, but they apply biblical insights to everyday issues.



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. Growing churches are not “pushy” or “manipulative” in the way they share the gospel, rather, their secret is to share the gospel in a way that meets the questions and needs of pre-Christians.



Loving Relationships: Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing church. Jesus said people will know we are his disciples by our love. Practical demonstration of love builds authentic Christian community and brings others into God’s kingdom. Unfeigned, practical love endows a church with a much greater magnetic power than all the marketing efforts of this world. Growing churches manifest a measurably higher “love quotient” than stagnant or declining ones.

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 Minimum Factor

Imagine a barrel with eight staves, each representing the eight quality characteristics. The staves in the barrel only reach as high as the score of the characteristic. With this analogy, you can only fill the barrel to the level of the lowest stave. So to increase the capacity of the barrel, we must increase the height of the lowest stave.



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

Growth Force Principles

The principles behind all the quality characteristics are the six growth forces. The survey assesses each of the eight quality characteristics by measuring the degree to which each is lived out in a 'biotic' way. Any plans to improve your minimum factor must take into account these six growth forces.

Interdependence: Individual units are connected to each other in a larger system. Changes in one ministry will affect other ministries in the church and community.
Synonym: Connecting

Multiplication: Healthy organisms do not grow endlessly, but reproduce themselves.
Synonym: Reproducing

Energy transformation: Momentum or energy already flowing, whether positive or negative, can be redirected to accomplish God's purposes.
Synonym: Harnessing

Multi-usage: Resources used should increase the capacity for on-going growth and development, as well as serve multiple purposes. Synonym: Sustaining

Symbiosis: Different ministries can cultivate cooperative relationships so the mutual benefit is greater than operating separately. Synonym: Cooperating

Functionality: Each ministry needs to produce discernible results in line with its intended purpose. Synonym: Evaluating

The NCD Process

The NCD process is a change process that will help a church address their minimum factor. A coach is beneficial to help a church engage in the NCD process with integrity to see the results maximized.

Step 1 – Prepare: Prepare your church to engage in the total NCD Process. Getting leadership buy-in, mobilizing intercessors and choosing a Church Health Team are all a part of this step.

Step 2 – Diagnose: Analyze the health of your church. This step begins with taking the survey followed by an in-depth analysis of your Minimum Factor. It concludes with identifying 3-5 key issues to address.

Step 3 – Plan: Plan to address your minimum factor. In this step the church health team will develop a strategic plan to address your 3-5 key issues identifies in Step 2.

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 you used and the results of your effort. Use the growth forces to determine increased health in you minimum factor then plan to re-take the survey.

Does NCD really work?

Founded on an extensive research project involving 1,000 churches, 6 continents, 32 countries, and 18 languages, NCD is the only scientifically valid study to be done in the area of measuring church health. Since then, 70 countries have launched national NCD partnerships.

But does it work? Follow up studies have been done in churches that have completed three or more surveys to assess what change happened during that timeframe. Between the first month (when the initial survey was completed) and the 31st month (by which time at least three surveys had been completed), the following measurable changes were demonstrated:

1. Quality increased by average of 6 points.
2. % of transfer growth decreased, while conversion growth increased*
3. Workload of leaders decreased.
4. Overall growth rate increased by 51% (on average). If a church is growing by 10 people per year, after the 31 months it was growing by 15 people per year. If 200 had been joining per year, after 31 months 302 were joining.

*Most churches do not keep these records, so to assess transfer growth vs. conversion growth, a question was added to the survey asking whether or not a participant has been a member of another church after becoming a Christian. Based on those responses, as churches continued to take surveys and go thru the NCD process, conversion growth gained over time, while transfer growth decreased significantly over time.

Sometimes it's helpful to hear about changes in specific churches or groups of churches as well. You could hear amazing stories from many quarters, but below is a newsletter from the Orlando District of the Florida United Methodist Church that describes some of their experience with the effectiveness of NCD.

Does NCD Really Make a Difference? (June, 2004 Orlando District Newsletter -- Jeff Stiggins)

NCD is a long-term process for assisting congregations to be more healthy and effective in fulfilling Christ's great commission. The greatest transformation usually begins to happen in the third year that congregations use the NCD process. Twelve congregations in the Orlando District are now beginning their second year in NCD. How have they, as a group, fared compared to other churches in our district? Recently Linda Mobley asked a professional statistician to look at the end of the year 2003 statistics and answer that question. Here are some of the staggering statistical differences she found in comparing these 12 NCD churches to the rest of the churches in our district that have not participated in NCD:

- Members received by profession of faith in NCD churches increased 89.5%; the rest of the churches in the district had a decline of 13.5%.
- Attendance in principle worship services in NCD churches increased 3.9%; the rest of the churches in the district had a decline of 5.5%.
- Attendance in short-term small groups in NCD churches increased 75.1%; the rest of the churches in the district had a decline of 16%.
- The number of persons removed by transfer to UM churches in NCD churches decreased 20.5%; the rest of the churches in the district had an increase of 53.8%.
- The number of persons removed by transfer to other denominations in NCD churches decreased 38.7%; the rest of the churches in the district had an increase of 25.8%.
- African American membership in NCD churches increased 21.2%; the rest of the churches in the district had an increase of 7.9%.

Biblical Promises for Change

Jeremiah 32:27 “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 16:3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

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.”

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Psalm 37:3-5 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen

Zechariah 4:6 So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

Philippians 4:3 Yes and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Mark 9:23 “‘If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Recommended Resources

Schwarz, Christian. *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996) ISBN 1-889638-00-5

Schwarz, Christian. *The ABC's of Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998) ISBN 1-889638-04-9

Schwarz, Christian A. & Schalk, Christoph. *Natural Church Development Survey and Implementation Guide* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998) ISBN 1-889638-03-X

Logan, Robert E. & Clegg, Thomas C. *Releasing Your Church's Potential* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998) ISBN# n/a

To order NCD products, to become an NCD coach, or to locate an NCD consultant to administer the survey with your church, contact: your NCD publishing partner at www.ncd-international.org or in the USA at:

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