

Summary of
Natural Church Development: Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches
by Christian A. Schwarz

Introduction to Natural Church Development:

“Natural church development is not just one church growth method among many. It is a different theological paradigm altogether. It introduces a different way of thinking for Christians. You may be wondering, can we really experience something like a new reformation in our days? Yes, in many churches around the globe there are signs that this is far more than a vague hope.”

(Christian Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*)

Biblical basis for Natural Church Development:

- Matthew 6:28
- Mark 4:26-29
- 1 Corinthians 3:6
- Key Question: How can we release the God-given potential that God has placed within EVERY church?

The study of church health:

From 1994-1996 the Institute for Natural Church Development gathered 4.2 million survey responses from over a 1000 churches (30 surveys from each church) representing 32 countries, 20 denominations, 18 languages, and 6 continents. These churches were large and small, growing and declining, persecuted and state-subsidized, charismatic and non-charismatic, prominent models and entirely unknown. The purpose of the research was to provide the first worldwide scientifically verifiable answers to the questions, “What church growth principles are true, regardless of culture and theological persuasion?” and “What should each church and every Christian do to obey the Great Commission in today’s world?”

Update to original research project (Fall, 2000):

- Over 20 million survey responses in database
- Over 5,000 churches surveyed (nearly 4000 in US)
- NCD partners in 38 countries
- NCD materials published in 25 languages
- Over 400 NCD consultants trained
- Of 500 churches in US which completed second survey 85% experienced qualitative and quantitative growth (2 reasons for no improvement: pre-existing internal conflict or failure to follow through)
- From the original random sample of 70 churches to the research project of 1000 churches to the current database of over 5000 churches the statistical formula has changed only slightly.

Eight quality characteristics were identified:

- Quality characteristic 1: *Empowering* leadership
- Quality characteristic 2: *Gift-oriented* ministry
- Quality characteristic 3: *Passionate* spirituality
- Quality characteristic 4: *Functional* structures
- Quality characteristic 5: *Inspiring* worship services
- Quality characteristic 6: *Holistic* small groups
- Quality characteristic 7: *Need-oriented* evangelism
- Quality characteristic 8: *Loving* relationships

Conclusions from the study:

- Growing and declining churches vary significantly in all eight quality areas
- Exception to this rule: some churches that are growing numerically have a below-average quality index which suggests that quantitative growth is attainable by other methods (such as effective marketing) and other factors (such as contextual factors). *Attainable* growth does not mean *sustainable* growth.
- One rule without an exception: Every church with a quality index of 65 or more for each of the eight quality characteristics is a growing church.
- On nearly all relevant quality factors, larger churches compare unfavorably with smaller ones.
- Average size of growing churches surveyed—297 membership and 202 worship

- Average size of declining churches surveyed—636 membership and 235 worship
- Annual growth rate of large churches surveyed was 3%
- Annual growth rate of small churches surveyed was 13%
- Above-average quantitative growth in worship attendance was 10% or more per year over a period of five years
- Quality index of large churches surveyed was 48
- Quality index of small churches surveyed was 52
- Quality index of a high quality growing church was 56

Application of the principles to improve church health:

- Conduct a Natural Church Development survey
 - Cost: \$150
 - Ministers and 30 co-workers (core workers involved in a ministry task and a small group)
- Determine the minimum factor(s) which require maximum attention (based on Church Profile)
- Form Implementation Team (5-7 members)
 - Team leader (good processor)
 - Strategic thinker (ask hard questions)
 - Researcher (assemble data)
 - Intercessor (seek God's will and leading)
 - Communicator (keep others informed)
 - Ministry team members based on minimum factor
- Set qualitative goals (with help of NCD Coach)

Examples of qualitative biotic goals (adapted from *Natural Church Development*):

- Leadership: *By the end of the year the elders will be released from 50% of their responsibilities in order to dedicate more time to the development of other leaders.*
- Ministry: *By the end of the year 80% of those attending worship will have discovered their spiritual gifts and 50% will be active in a ministry corresponding to their gifts.*
- Spirituality: *By the end of the year we will have assigned a person with a passion for spiritual disciplines to assume oversight of the prayer ministry.*
- Structures: *By the end of the year we will have appointed a point person for each of the nine areas of ministry our church has established.*
- Worship: *By the end of the year we will have a service designed to reach non-Christians and every quarter we will have one celebration service for the entire church family.*
- Small groups: *By the end of the year we will have trained leaders and co-leaders for 15 small groups.*
- Evangelism: *By the end of the year we will have identified the 10% of our congregation who have the gift of evangelism and will have met with each one regarding their ministry.*
- Relationships: *After studying the "Learning to Love Process" for three months, each small group participant will be able to say, "I am enjoying being a part of this fellowship more than in the past."*
- Identify and address obstacles
- Apply biotic principles
 - *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.
 - *Multiplication*—Healthy organisms do not grow endlessly, but reproduce themselves.
 - *Energy transformation*—Momentum or energy already flowing, whether positive or negative, can be redirected to accomplish God's purposes
 - *Multi-usage*—Resources used should increase the capacity for on-going growth and development, as well as serve multiple purposes.
 - *Symbiosis*—Different ministries can cultivate cooperative relationships so the mutual benefit is greater than operating separately.
 - *Functionality*—Each ministry needs to produce discernible results in line with its intended purpose
 - Exercise your strengths (maximum quality factors) to address your weaknesses (minimum quality factors)
- Utilize biotic tools
- Monitor effectiveness
- Address new minimum factor(s) (conduct another survey)
- Multiply your church