

Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches

- Does being a healthy church mean that it is “successful,” growing by leaps and bounds?

Maybe...

-Is a healthy church simply a place where people come to meet God and neighbor, as small as 2 or 3 people gathered together?

Perhaps...

-What then are some of the key elements that will help ensure a congregation’s optimum health?

Christian Schwarz studied 1000 congregations in terms of both quantity and quality standards and identified 8 essential elements in healthy churches. He recognized that God’s church will grow naturally if it’s functioning in a healthy manner. The job of the church staff and vestries then, is to be aware of the important areas, which if not functioning well, will tend to block healthy church development.

It is interesting to note that Schwarz’s research findings, although presented in terms of statistics, diagrams, and charts, parallel both common sense and Scripture. He further advises that according to his study, all 8 elements are essential, none may be missing. He also noted that whenever each of these elements scored 65 or higher on his quality index in a church, that the congregation was indeed growing.

Schwarz suggests identifying which areas need the most improvement and concentrate on them. The areas of strength can also be used to find creative ways to deal with weaker areas. Specific staff and vestry goals can be made for the areas that need to be worked on and developed.

Essential quality characteristics for churches:

1. Empowering leadership

Leaders empower others for ministry. Leaders let go of responsibility and let God’s energy be seen in other members. Pastors need to be both goal and relationship oriented.

2. Gift-oriented ministry

People are able to recognize and use their God-given talents and Spiritual gifts for ministry both inside the church and in the local community.

3. Passionate spirituality

Christians in these congregations are “on fire” (Spirit filled). They have a genuine relationship with God. People’s lives are committed to their faith. They are enthusiastic and joyful.

4. Functional structures

The structure in a healthy church promotes growth rather than hinders it. This book suggests that department heads may work best, recommending that a co-leader (or a person in training) also be an automatic part of the structure. The right person for each job is one who has the appropriate Spiritual gift.

5. Inspiring worship service

Spirit-filled worship with the people thoroughly involved in the services.

6. Holistic small groups

Groups are to go beyond study and discussion to applying God’s message to daily life. Small groups are the place where Christianity can really be practiced. Groups multiply by having the co-leaders form two separate groups after a time. Each new group invites new participants and selects an additional co-leader.

7. Need-oriented evangelism

The pastor knows which 10% of the congregation have the gift of evangelism and encourage them to make use of it. She/he also encourages all members to individually share Christ with those they do know. Evangelism efforts should be focused on the person’s questions and needs. Congregation-wide efforts would take the energy of the people’s interests and the community’s needs and redirect them to God’s ways.

8. Loving relationships

This is the experience of Christian love, not just talking about it. Examples include spending time together, compliments, being aware of personal problems, and laughter.

Based on Christian A. Schwarz’s book: *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, 4th ed. St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2000.

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