

The 8 Essential Qualities of Healthy Growing Churches

Coventry Diocese are applying the results of international research on church health and growth undertaken by the Natural Church Development (NCD) Institute. This research has been drawn from 82,000 churches across the world, in all continents, and from most traditions, denominations, cultures, sizes and settings.

These qualities are a way of life, not a programme or model. Individuals, groups and whole churches are encouraged to work towards ensuring that all of these 8 qualities permeate through their whole life and ministry.

Each quality encompasses a range of characteristics which are briefly outlined below. Each description ends with a summary from the book *“Colour Your World with Natural Church Development”* by Christian Schwarz, who founded the NCD Institute.

Empowering Leadership

In Empowering Leadership all leaders in the church intentionally seek to identify, train and empower other leaders, giving them responsibility for people and projects, and rejoicing when they do better than they do! Empowering leaders lead and empower others to lead. They explain, motivate and liberate through mentoring and on-the-job training.

Christian A Schwarz: ‘Leaders of growing churches consider it as one of their most important tasks to empower others. They equip, support, motivate and mentor individuals to become all that God wants them to be. Some of these individuals may even be led in a different direction than their leaders. Empowering leaders can rejoice about such a situation with all their heart because they know that God has a unique calling for every individual.’

Gift-based Ministry

Every individual is unique and serving the Kingdom of God both within and outside the church is based on a person’s gifts and skill. Gift-based Ministry helps people identify their particular and unique God-given passions, gifts, skills and personality which enables them to serve in a way that changes the world for the better. As they serve in this way people are fulfilled and flourish in their mission and ministry both within and outside the church community.

Christian A Schwarz: ‘The role of the leadership is to help its members identify their gifts and find or create ministries that match them. When you live in harmony with your spiritual gifting, you are no longer ministering in your own strength.’

Passionate Spirituality

The word ‘Passionate’ has its root in ‘suffering’ and self-sacrifice. So a Passionate Spirituality is prepared to suffer for the sake of others. It is a spirituality that is authentic and real, which hungers for God and has a vibrancy of faith. People have a living and infectious personal relationship with Jesus Christ, nurtured through prayer, worship and spiritual disciplines including sacrificial giving. They manifest the fruit of the Spirit in every aspect of their lives as they pursue holiness and obedience.

Christian A Schwarz: As far as the growth of the church is concerned, our research indicates that the important thing is not a church’s style, but the degree to which faith is actually lived out with commitment, passion and enthusiasm.’



Functional Structures

The structures exist to enable the church to function effectively and for the 8 Essential Qualities to flourish. The ministries of the church have clear purposes and members understand the church’s mission. Functional Structures are flexible, able to adapt and change as necessary to facilitate further growth. All the structures of the church serve the mission and purpose of the church.

Christian A Schwarz: ‘The most important criterion for church structures is the degree to which they fulfil their purpose. Whatever does not measure up to this requirement (e.g. demeaning leadership patterns, inconvenient worship service times, or programmes that do not effectively reach their intended audience) should be changed or laid to rest. Through this process of constant renewal, traditionalistic ruts can be avoided to a large extent.’

Inspiring Worship

Inspiring Worship is about quality rather than style. It will be a high point of the week, and is so inspiring people will want to bring along people who do not have a Christian faith to experience it. Visitors who come are able to enjoy the experience. Inspiring worship helps us to meet with Jesus. It provides space and opportunity for a mutual encounter with God Himself. Inspiring worship is transformative ... people’s lives change for the better as a result!

Christian A Schwarz: ‘Our research indicates that the question is not whether a worship service targets believers or non-believers; whether it is loaded with Christian symbolism or strives to radiate a secular, business-like atmosphere; whether the worship follows a formal or a more free-flowing style. The key criterion is something else: Is the worship service an inspiring experience for those who attend it? It is this aspect that clearly separates growing from non-growing churches. People who attend inspiring worship services declare that the worship service is – and for some believers this is almost a heretical word – “fun.”’

Holistic Small Groups

Holistic Small Groups are any church group which is small, and they behave like 'mini-church'. In Holistic Small Groups closer relationships can be formed and the members engage in worship, prayer – for others and each other, pastoral support, ongoing discipleship, Bible application and outreach. Holistic Small Groups enable people to use their spiritual gifts and they plan to grow and multiply themselves.

Christian A Schwarz: 'Growing churches have developed a system of small groups where individual believers can find intimate community, practical help and intense spiritual interaction. In these groups, people do not only discuss biblical texts and listen to their leader's interesting explanations, they apply biblical insights to the questions the participants have about everyday life issues.'

Need-oriented Outreach

Need-oriented Outreach is seen in people and Christian communities filled with the Holy Spirit involved in the messiest parts of the parish.... the people who are hurting the most, the poorest, the most isolated, the ones who need loving the most...etc. The only reason for doing this is to love people with Christ's love.

Members can talk naturally about their faith, sharing it with others. For people wishing to explore a journey to and in the Christian faith, the church has clear processes to help them along the stepping stones to and in discipleship.

Christian A Schwarz: 'It can be shown that pushy, manipulative methods represent the exact opposite of the practice we learn from growing churches. Their secret is the way they share the gospel in a way that answers the questions and meets the needs of non-believers.'

Loving Relationships

Loving Relationships are characterised by a fun, welcoming and forgiving atmosphere. Healthy churches were shown to have a lot of laughter in them. The church is welcoming, accessible and inclusive and reflects the wider community. Forgiveness is the starting point of Christian faith for us all and is reflected in relationships that are loving, affirming and encouraging.

Christian A Schwarz: 'How much time do members spend with one another outside of official church-sponsored events? How often do they invite one another for meals or a cup of coffee? How generous is the church in doling out compliments? To what extent is the pastor aware of the personal needs of the church's lay people? How much laughter is there in the church?'

'All these points – and quite a few more – have a strong correlation with the growth of the church. In fact, factors like these turned out to be statistically much more significant than many of the methods that a number of books have elevated to the status of church growth principles. ... Authentic love endows a church with a much greater magnetic power than all the marketing efforts of this world.'

To find out more, please contact

Rev. Clive Hicks

Healthy Churches Development Enabler

Clive.Hicks@Coventry.Anglican.Org

07496 821460

or visit <https://coventry.anglican.org/about/more-about-us/growing-healthy-churches/>



Understanding the 8 Essential Qualities of Healthy Growing Churches



The Diocese of Coventry