ABSTRACT

USING STRATEGIC SMALL GROUPS TO IMPROVE CHURCH HEALTH AT

ROCKLEDGE BAPTIST CHURCH, ROCKLEDGE, FLORIDA

by

David Rhodes

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the health of Rockledge Baptist Church using NCD's survey and to see if strategic small groups targeting specific health characteristics are an effective way of improving health. This study is an evaluation study in the quasi-experimental mode that uses a pre-, mid-, and posttest design. Both a criterion-based group, using NCD's suggested criteria, and a random group were tested.

Great improvement showed in two of the targeted characteristics with negligible improvement in the other. Overall improvement was much greater in the criterion-based group than in the random group.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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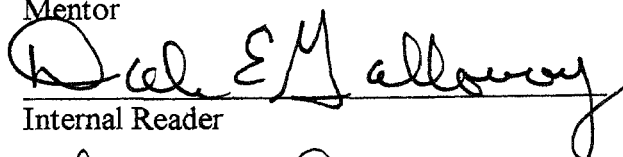
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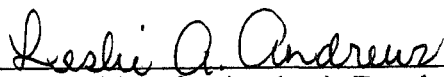
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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Background

Rockledge Bible Church was born on 27 September 1979. Twenty-one people joined Pastor Joe Brown in forming a church designed to take the "Unchanging Gospel to a Changing World." From the beginning, the church has featured a strong commitment to the faithful exposition of the inspired biblical text.

Pastor Brown led the church through several significant milestones. One of the most significant was the purchase of 2 1/2 acres of land on the south side of the town of Rockledge, Florida. This acreage included an abandoned 1,600 square-foot building that was renovated and transformed into a church under Pastor Brown's guidance with Pastor Brown doing much of the work himself. Recently, the church purchased an additional five acres adjacent to the current property.

Rockledge is a growing town of almost twenty thousand people. The south side of Rockledge, where the church is located, is where most of this growth is occurring. During the twenty-year life of the church, the town has literally grown around it. In addition to the growth of Rockledge, a new community, called Viera, has exploded into existence just a few miles south of the church. Pastor Brown's selection of a location for the church has put it in optimal position to reach its growing community.

The church fluctuated in attendance during Pastor Brown's seven-year tenure, peaking at around sixty. During the latter part of Pastor Brown's ministry, the church voted to change the name to Rockledge Baptist Church. The pastor and some members of the congregation apparently thought that a Baptist denominational identification might attract more visitors. Instead the church experienced division and attendance dwindled.

Soon afterwards, Pastor Brown accepted a call from a church in Nova Scotia. Rockledge

Baptist almost closed its doors when attendance fell to less than thirty.

The Problem

The conundrum of plateaued and declining churches may be one of the most

significant issues the church in America is facing today. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, in

their book entitled *Leading Congregational Change*, report, "The portion of the

population that is active in congregational life is decreasing, as is Christianity's moral

influence in our culture. Approximately two-thirds of the Protestant congregations in

America have long-term attendance trends that are either flat or declining" (x). One

reason most churches are not growing is that they are not reaching the unchurched.

George Hunter asserts that "the vast majority of churches have not, within memory,

reached and discipled any really secular persons" (25).

The problem of plateaued and declining churches crosses denominations and is

not localized to any particular geographical area or limited to any particular size of

congregation. While the problem has been well documented and solutions have been

suggested, there is no present evidence that the problem is receding. If anything, the

situation appears to be getting worse. As the number of plateaued and declining churches

continues to grow and as the age of the members of these congregations increases, many

North American churches may face extinction, unless something changes.

In the past sixteen years, Rockledge Baptist has come back from the verge of

extinction. I became the pastor of Rockledge Baptist in May 1986, at which time the

active membership included six families with an average attendance of less than thirty.

In the thirteen years of my tenure leading up to this study, the church grew slowly but

steadily to an average attendance of almost 350. The largest jump in attendance occurred

in 1990 when we completed our new sanctuary. At that time, Sunday morning

attendance jumped from around one hundred to approximately 170 over a period of about

six months.

The church experienced amazing unity during those thirteen years. This unity

was maintained in spite of the fact that there have been many changes. Possibly the

greatest change was the transition from a fairly legalistic church to a church that is more

in the evangelical mainstream. Most of these transitions were made gradually and

prayerfully enough that there were few defections. At the commencement of the study,

the church was continuing to grow, giving was exceeding budget, and there was a great

sense of expectancy for even greater things in the future.

In spite of the progress, there were some major hurdles to future church growth.

The growth in attendance at Rockledge Baptist Church was not accompanied by a

corresponding development of church organizational structure and ministry opportunities.

Members who came from other churches with more developed ministries and structure

often expressed concern and frustration with this lack. The church had a moderately

successful Sunday school program, no organized small groups ministry, no organized

approach for training lay people for ministry, and a poor record of developing spiritual

leaders. Most of the growth of the church had come through transfer growth rather than

from new converts.

An informal congregational assessment completed before the study was

commenced disclosed that the faithful "preaching and teaching" of God's Word was the

principle attraction of people to the ministry (Jolemore 12). The growth of the church

had been almost exclusively built around the Sunday morning worship experience.

Church leadership acknowledged that Rockledge Baptist's attendance had grown without

the corresponding growth in the superstructure needed to support this growth.

As the church leadership contemplated ways to overcome this deficit, I was appointed to the Beeson Pastors' Program. This program is designed to equip pastors with the very skills that I lacked in building our ministry. The congregation enthusiastically granted me an eleven-month sabbatical to pursue this opportunity. The plan was for me to gather the expertise needed for taking the next steps in enlarging the ministry of Rockledge Baptist.

During my absence, the church worked to ready itself for significant change and growth upon my return. A futures committee was formed and made some specific recommendations for change. Steps were taken to improve parking. Leadership training was offered, and a greater commitment to outreach was promoted. The interim leadership fostered an attitude of expectancy about the future, and I periodically shared some of my hopes and dreams.

Through the years, the church has steadfastly resisted the use of the gimmickry that some churches have used to grow their ministries. The leadership of Rockledge Baptist has always insisted that growth be pursued in a biblical manner and for biblical reasons. This tendency has been pushed to an unhealthy extreme at times, especially since I, as pastor of the church, tend towards what Christian Schwarz calls "a spiritualistic paradigm" (*Natural* 90). Our emphasis on spiritual values such as prayer, godliness, and faith has often inappropriately precluded valid goal setting and planning. This problem was reflected in the fact that an informal ministerial assessment revealed that the congregation was well aware of our "spiritual goals but none spoke of objective or practical goals" (Jolemore 12).

Although future church growth will doubtless require some specific, practical

goals, leaders at Rockledge Baptist were more open to pursuing qualitative goals than quantitative goals. We tended to believe that doing ministry better would naturally result in greater opportunities for ministry. Indeed, church health literature has repeatedly asserted that church growth is a natural outcome of church health (e.g., Schwarz; Snyder; Warren). Therefore, Rockledge Baptist was seeking ways to become a healthier congregation.

Our desire to be a healthier congregation strengthened our determination to move towards being a church with small groups. We attempted to institute a small groups ministry a number of years earlier, but without proper training the effort failed. As a part of this study, we planned not only to implement small groups as a method of caring for our congregation but also to form task groups that could focus on improving selected church health characteristics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a strategic small group ministry model is an effective way of strengthening church health in terms of eight quality characteristics. An associated area of investigation was to determine if a randomly chosen group would rate health characteristics differently than Natural Church Development's (NCD) standard criterion-based group. A final area of investigation was to determine the relationship between changes in church health and church growth at Rockledge Baptist.

Description of the Project

The study assessed the state of church health by using surveys to measure the eight quality characteristics as identified by Christian Schwarz. These are

1. Empowering leadership,

2. Gift-oriented ministry,

3. Passionate spirituality,

4. Functional structures,

5. Inspiring worship services,

6. Holistic small groups,

7. Need-oriented evangelism, and

8. Loving relationships (*Natural* 15-39).

Two groups of thirty participants each were chosen to participate in the study. The

selection of one group was criterion-based and the other was randomized. The three

criteria that were used in the selection of the criterion-based sample as specified by

ChurchSmart were that participants are perceived by the pastor to be in the center of

church life, that they are actively involved in a ministry in the church, and that they are in

a small group or Sunday school class. The randomized sample was chosen from all

members of Rockledge Baptist Church who are eighteen years old or older and are active

in the church (attend services at least twice a month).

Both groups completed the NCD survey. The completed surveys were mailed to

ChurchSmart Resources for tabulation and analysis. The results indicated the church's

areas of strength and weakness.

Shortly after I returned to the church as pastor, I recruited what Donahue calls a

"turbo group" (75). I met with this turbo group weekly for three months during the

summer on Sunday evenings to equip the members to start and lead small groups that we

planned to form in the fall. Some of the people in the turbo group were recruited and

some responded to my open invitation to join the group for training as a small group

leader. Those recruited for the turbo group were recruited because they either had a

passion for one of Schwarz's development characteristics or had expressed interest in a teaching ministry.

Most of the small groups birthed from the turbo group were care groups. Care groups, when properly organized, can aid in the development of leaders, provide relational care for those in the group, give opportunity for ministry, facilitate spiritual growth in the participants, and serve as vehicle for evangelism. Since each of these benefits corresponds with one of Schwarz's development characteristics, just the existence of these groups probably contributed to the health of Rockledge Baptist Church. Indeed, Schwarz maintains that "if we were to identify any *one* [original emphasis] principle as the 'most important' . . . without a doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups" (*Natural* 33).

Additionally, specific leaders from the turbo group were recruited to formulate task groups to address specific areas of church health. These task groups were supposed to function similarly to the care groups but also focus on providing support and leadership to the church for one of Schwarz's development characteristics. The NCD survey confirmed the previous perception that holistic small groups, empowered evangelism, and gift-oriented ministry were among Rockledge Baptist Church's minimum factors. These quality characteristics received priority in tasking. Bob Logan and Thomas Clegg's *Releasing Your Church's Potential*, which provides guidance in addressing each of Schwarz's quality characteristics, served as a guide to aid the task groups in devising a strategy for improvement in their assigned area.

In his book, *The Community of the King*, Howard Snyder proposes just such an approach towards specific ministry areas. He writes,

> Christians concerned about specific needs or interested in particular

ministries could profitably band together as mission groups, functioning as small group fellowships around that specific ministry or mission. . . . These are task-oriented or mission groups, each existing for a specific but different purpose. While Bible study, prayer and sharing are common to all groups, each group also has a very specific mission for which it exists and to which it is dedicated. (153-54)

After the small groups birthed from the turbo group met for six months, I intended to administer the Natural Church Development survey again to the same thirty lay people (with replacements chosen for those who were no longer available) in both the criterion-based and the randomized groups. Because of the difficulty in transitioning care groups to task groups this testing was delayed for six months. This survey revealed the changes in the eight quality characteristics compared with the initial survey. The results of the survey were used to provide feedback on progress to the various task groups and to guide necessary adjustments in strategy. This process continued for another six months. At the conclusion of this period, a final survey was administered to the same two groups again. After all three survey results were tabulated, changes in church health were compared with changes in church growth.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study.

Research Question 1

What level of health, as measured by the Natural Church Development (NCD) survey, existed in Rockledge Baptist Church at the onset of this study?

Research Question 2

What effect did a strategic small group ministry that utilized small groups to address the various components of church health have on the health of the church?

Operational question 1. Did the second and third NCD survey reveal an

increase in the minimum factors?

Research Question 3

What effect did changes in the health of the church have on church growth?

Definition of Terms

In this study, the principal terms are defined as follows.

Turbo group is a small group filled with apprentices (Donahue 75). Such a group can be useful for birthing a large number of small groups in a shorter amount of time than developing individual apprentices within existing small groups. The greater efficiency of the turbo group in proliferating small groups results both from the fact that the group has a higher concentration of potential leaders and that those potential leaders are given more intensive training.

Natural Church Development (NCD) is an approach to church growth based on the premise that God causes the growth and that all human endeavors should be focused on releasing the "divine growth automatisms" by which God grows God's Church. Christian Schwarz discovered these principles through empirical research, by observing nature, and by studying Scripture. He reports them in his book *Natural Church Development* (8-9).

Eight Quality Characteristics are eight aspects of church health that, when taken together, can be used to diagnose the health of the church. The survey conducted by Schwarz's German-based Institute for Natural Church Development identified these eight aspects as empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship service, holistic small groups, need oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. Harmonious interplay among all eight quality characteristics is the key to church growth (*Natural* 15-39).

Maximum Factors of a church are the strongest quality characteristics, measured on a scale of 1 to 100. NCD strategy seeks to utilize these strengths to improve a church's minimum factors (Schwarz, *Natural* 49-57).

Minimum Factors of a church are the weakest quality characteristics, measured on a scale of 1 to 100. NCD depicts them as the shortest staves of a barrel that hinders qualitative growth in the same way that short staves on a physical barrel set the upper limit for the amount of liquid it will hold (Schwarz, *Natural* 49-57).

Biotic is a term Schwarz uses to imply a rediscovery of the laws of life that God created. Instead of using the term "church growth," Schwarz's institute has chosen to call it "natural" or "biotic" church development (*Natural* 7).

Church growth is defined by changes in weekly worship attendance. Increase in attendance is positive growth, decrease in attendance is negative growth, and no change in attendance is no growth. While baptisms and conversions are part of a more holistic understanding of church growth these measures were not available for past years at Rockledge Baptist.

Methodology

This study is an evaluation study in the quasi-experimental mode that can be diagrammed as follows: **O→X→O→X→O.**

The "O's" represent pre-, mid-, and posttesting of church health. The "X's" represent six-month applications of the treatment—strategic effort guided by Bob Logan's coaching material to use small groups to improve the various quality characteristics of church health as identified by NCD. The aim of these surveys was to assess the health of the church according to the eight quality characteristics and to determine whether strategic effort directed through small groups over a year's time results in improvement.

Changes in church health were then compared to any changes in worship attendance to determine the relationship between church growth and church health at Rockledge Baptist Church.

Population and Subjects

The population for the survey was lay members over eighteen years of age who regularly attend at least two services a month at Rockledge Baptist Church. Two sample groups, one criterion-based and the other randomized, were selected from this population. The criterion-based group met three criteria as specified by the ChurchSmart instructions given with the testing instrument. The three criteria are as follows:

1. The pastor considers them to be in the center of church life;

2. They are actively involved in a ministry in the church; and,

3. They are a member of a small group/cell group/home group/ or Sunday school class.

The criterion-based group was selected with the attempt to represent the entire spectrum of the congregation. The selection of the randomized group was made without any reference to church demographics.

The participants in the turbo group were recruited based on perceived leadership potential, the perceived current level of influence, and availability. The turbo group was also open to those who responded to an open invitation to train to be a small group leader. The participants in the turbo group who volunteered to lead a task group were supposed to recruit a small group of people who share a similar passion.

Variables

The dependent variable of the study, improvement in the health of the church as measured by eight quality characteristics, is defined as an increase on the NCD survey

scale of 1 to 100 on the second and third assessment. An increase in each area was desired but an increase in the minimum factors was the priority goal of the effort. Another desired impact was an increase in church attendance. Attendance was then compared with any changes in church health to determine if there was a relationship. The independent variable was the strategic small groups that were formed and tasked with targeting specific church health quality characteristics.

Instrumentation

The instrument for the survey conducted at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the project was a survey developed by Natural Church Development. NCD studied over one thousand churches from thirty-two different countries. The study "developed into the most comprehensive research project of the causes of church growth ever undertaken" (Schwarz, *Natural* 18). The survey was further refined through the efforts of Christoph Schalk, a German social scientist and psychologist. He devised "a new questionnaire with rigorous standards for objectivity, reliability, and validity, and he used approved methods from social science for the analysis of the data" (19). ChurchSmart Resources of Carol Stream, Illinois, then translated and revised the survey for use in North America.

The values they obtained were then normed to a median of 50, which would reflect the "average church" on each quality index. They found that differences between growing and declining churches in all eight quality characteristics are "highly significant." Possibly the most significant finding was that every church which had a quality index of 65 or more in each of the quality characteristics was a growing church. There was not a single exception (Schwarz, *Natural* 39).

The last decade has produced a proliferation of books and articles on church health. A potentially confusing aspect of this proliferation is that while there is some

overlap in the health characteristics listed by different authors, there is also a great deal of diversity. Some of this diversity is the result of similar factors being expressed differently. However, every health writer has some distinct characteristics. This lack of consistency can leave the reader wondering which, if any, list of church health characteristics is valid.

I believe that most, if not all, of the characteristics that are listed by church health writers are valid (e.g., Dale Galloway; Rick Warren; Stephen Macchia; Christian Schwarz). Church health is multifaceted, and the characteristics included by multiple authors are probably the more prominent contributors to church health. The areas unique to a specific author may just be the inclusion of a factor that is a little less prominent.

Perhaps the fact that there may be different tests of church health should not overly concern us. In human health there are thousands of diagnostic tests that can be conducted. Each of them is valuable for certain diagnostic needs, yet, when a person goes to the doctor for a "physical," only a handful of diagnostic tests are conducted. Usually, additional tests are conducted only if one of the standard tests or other symptoms indicates a problem. For most people, a reasonably accurate assessment of health is made from just a handful of the tests available. A similar situation in diagnosing church health is likely. We can make a reasonably accurate assessment of church health from any of the lists I have reviewed.

The strength of Schwarz's quality characteristics is their statistical documentation. Schwarz's massive amount of research and analysis serves to strengthen the case for the health characteristics he enumerates. At present, no other list claims to be based on such a substantial research base.

Data Collection

The NCD survey is a paper-and pencil instrument with ninety-one questions on four pages. It was administered to both groups before any small groups were formed as a pre-test. For the criterion-based group, I generated a pool of potential candidates and gave them to the church secretary to check for availability. The pool was greater than the number needed because it was anticipated that some people would not be available. Participants were notified by phone, and a confirmation was sent to each one by mail. The participants were chosen so that they would be evenly divided by gender and no family would be represented by more than one participant. Effort was made to choose participants that were representative of the entire congregation. The randomized group was randomly chosen without reference to any church demographics. The participants in the criterion-based group were excluded from the population for this sample.

The surveys were then mailed to ChurchSmart for tabulation and analysis. The procedure was repeated six months and one year after strategic small groups had been formed to strengthen the targeted quality characteristics.

Delimitations

This study was birthed out of a need within Rockledge Baptist Church. Church leadership has acknowledged that current church growth has exceeded the infrastructure to support the growth in attendance. The study measured health indicators and attempted to remediate areas of weakness through strategic small groups. Assessment was limited to lay members who were at least eighteen years old, regularly attended Rockledge Baptist Church and who met the three criteria designated by ChurchSmart or were part of the randomized group. Participants who represent a cross-section of the congregation were selected to participate in the criterion-based group.

Generalizability

The findings of this study have direct application only for the congregation of

Rockledge Baptist Church. Generalizations to other congregations can only be made

with great caution. The data accumulated from the NCD survey adds to the pool of data

that continues to be used to validate the NCD instrument. This study may contribute an

additional approach for improving church health. That approach is the strategic use of

small groups to address areas of weakness as indicated by the NCD instrument.

Theological Foundation

Church growth literature and strategies have often ignited fires of controversy in

the church. Certain church leaders have great suspicions about the motivation,

conclusions, and recommendations of many church growth specialists. For others,

church growth literature is seen almost like a "second coming" or a new birth for the

church. These advocates of church growth give testimony of virtually dead churches that

were "reborn" through church growth strategies.

Often the controversies about church growth literature center on the emphasis on

quantitative growth. Those resistant to church growth strategies are quick to point out

that only God makes the church grow (1 Cor. 3:6). They also insist that God calls

Christians to be faithful, not necessarily successful (Matt. 25:21-23; 1 Cor. 4:2; Rev.

2:10). They point out that though men like Noah, Jeremiah, and Stephen were approved

by God, they would probably be viewed as failures by some church growth criteria.

Those advocating church growth often counter with the explosive record of the growth of

the church that is recorded in the book of Acts. They wonder how anyone could assert

that God is unconcerned with numerical growth when the book of Acts not only affirms

the growth of the church, but the account even actually recorded some of the "dreaded"

numbers (Acts 2:41; 4:4). Church growth authorities imply that anyone who has trouble with numbers actually has a problem with God.

As in most controversies, there are elements of truth on both sides. Although the book of Acts records the growth of the church, it would be difficult to assert that God measures success solely or even primarily on growth alone. However, the biblical record also indicates that healthy New Testament churches grew. They did not all grow at the same rate or to the same extent, but they all grew.

Church health seems to provide a theologically sound balance to both sides of this controversy. The emphasis on church health is an emphasis on qualitative growth, as opposed to quantitative growth (Schwarz, *Natural* 14). It seems evident that church growth *can* degenerate to little more than a numbers game that is pursued more to feed egos than for God's glory. Most who are familiar with the church are aware of cases where growth was pursued with dubious methods and selfish motives. While an emphasis on church health can also be corrupted, its emphasis on quality instead of quantity serves as at least a partial hedge to this corruption. It may be validly pointed out that a large church is not necessarily a good church, but it is hard to make a case *against* a healthy church.

Church health also has other advantages. First, it is a goal that can be pursued by any church of any size in any situation. While building a large church may be impossible in some rural settings, a healthy congregation can certainly be developed in such a setting. Secondly, a healthy church is by nature an assembly that uses the church to build a great people rather than an assembly that uses people to build a great church. Finally, almost without exception, healthy churches grow (Schwarz, *Natural* 40).

Schwarz believes that focusing on church health is an appropriate modification of

church growth strategy. He has envisioned a new paradigm for viewing the church—a

paradigm he terms "bipolar." Schwarz indicates that the church is both organism and

organization. The organism pole is God-dependent. The organizational pole is man-

made. Church health is dependent on the viability of both poles (*Paradigm* 84-85). The

interaction of these two poles is vividly described in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, which Schwarz

calls the "*locus classicus*" of the interaction between the organism and organization poles

(256). 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 says,

> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither
> he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes
> it grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose,
> and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's
> fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Paul clearly indicates in these verses that both poles are operative in the growth of

church. God does his part, but people must also do their part.

Overview of the Study

In Chapter 2, selected literature and research pertinent to this study are reviewed.

A brief history of the church growth movement is presented. The theological basis of

church health is given, and contemporary writings on church health are examined. The

eight quality characteristics of church health as identified by Natural Church

Development are presented and the critiques of NCD research are explored.

In Chapter 3, a detailed explanation regarding the design of the project, the

research methods, and the methods of data analysis are presented.

In Chapter 4, the findings of the study are presented.

In Chapter 5, the conclusions of the study and the practical applications that flow

from these conclusions are reported. It also offers suggestions for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent years have produced a proliferation of literature on the church. Writers across the theological spectrum have offered their perspectives on how to "do church" in the modern world. Unfortunately, all of this writing has not resulted in a consensus. The average church practitioner is often left contemplating information that is not only divergent but at times contradictory. The result of this lack of consensus is similar to the time of the Judges when there was no king in Israel and "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judg. 21:25).

One of the most controversial topics over the last thirty years has centered on church growth. The publication of Donald McGavran's *Understanding Church Growth* in 1970 seems to have been a watershed event in American church life. Since that time, church growth adherents have produced voluminous materials to specify their observations and to defend their perspective. Many of the pastors of the largest churches in America have utilized this body of literature to produce growth in their congregations. However, the movement has produced as many critics as proponents. Opponents of the church growth movement often depict the movement as an idolatrous exchange of the ways of God for the ways of man.

A relatively recent entrant into this arena of controversy is a growing body of literature proposing church health as a more theologically balanced approach to optimizing the ministry of the local church. While this movement is still in its infancy, it seems to offer some of the positive aspects that have been uncovered by the church growth movement with less potential for creating a theological firestorm from its opponents or applicational abuse by its adherents. It must be acknowledged that most of

the writing on church health at present is intuitive and suppositional. Church health

proponents have yet to demonstrate thoroughly the value of church health as a diagnostic

and prescriptive tool for producing vibrant, healthy, and growing congregations. This

study attempted to examine this value in a limited context.

The Nature of the Church

Before addressing the specific issue of church health, it is important to establish

some theological perspectives on the nature of the church. If the church is merely a

human organization that has been invented to propagate its own agenda, then the

parameters for this discussion are exclusively pragmatic. The church should employ

those methods that produce the desired results most efficiently. However, if the church is

a divine institution then additional parameters are introduced. Pragmatic considerations

must be subsumed under the divine design.

The Divine Design

In Mathew 16:18 Jesus tells Peter, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this

rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." While much

debate has surrounded the interpretation of some aspects of this verse, Christ clearly

indicates here that the church is *his* church. The implications of this fact are pervasive.

Churches are not the possession or invention of men, and therefore, men are not free to

conduct them in any way they please. The purpose, methods, goals, structure, and other

aspects of the church may be manipulated only within the directives of God. Although a

great deal of freedom seems to be given to the church so that it can remain a viable

institution throughout many ages and cultures, we are not free to "do" church any way we

please.

Interestingly, all sides of the controversy agree on this point. Church growth

proponents and church growth critics, as well as church health proponents, assert that the

church is more than a human organization. They share the view that the church is a

divine institution. The controversy seems to surround the question of how much latitude

the divine design allows for pragmatic consideration.

The same year that Donald McGavran wrote his classic, *Understanding Church

Growth*, Francis Schaeffer gave some advice that can aid us in making such decisions.

Schaeffer made the case for form and freedom in the operation of the church. He

maintains that there is a prescribed form that defines what "limits the New Testament

places upon the institutional church" (53). He enumerates a number of what he sees as

essential forms but then points out that "there are vast areas which are left free" (59). He

concludes by maintaining,

> My primary point . . . is, on the one hand, that there is a place for the
> institutional church, and that it should maintain the form commanded by
> God, but on the other hand, that this leaves vast areas of freedom for
> change. It is my thesis that as we cannot bind men morally except where
> the Scripture clearly commands, . . . similarly *anything the New
> Testament does not command concerning church form is a freedom to
> be exercised under the leadership of the Holy Spirit for that particular
> time and place* [original emphasis]. (59-60)

Similarly, Howard Snyder distinguishes the structures which comprise the essence

of the church and are unchanging from the institutional structures which he terms as

"para-church" that often must change. Snyder indicates that the most general and most

basic structures of the early church were charismatic leadership, large-group worship, and

small group fellowship (146). These are universal and unchanging components of the

church. Outside of these basic structures there are institutional structures for which the

"Bible gives very little specific guidance" (139). He insists that while church structure

should be biblically valid, within biblical parameters it should also be culturally viable

and temporally flexible. He says, "Cultures are dynamic, not static. As they change, changes in church structure will also be necessary . . . faithfulness to unchanging biblical truth often requires changing structures as time passes" (142-43).

Christian Schwarz shines further light on the balance between form and freedom with his "bipolar ecclesiology" (*Paradigm* 14). This bipolar approach makes the case that the church is both an organism and an organization. Near the beginning of his book, *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, Schwarz lays the foundation for this theological view of the church. He writes,

> The nature of the church is made up of two elements: a dynamic pole (organism) and a static pole (organization). Both are necessary for church development, and both poles are implied in the New Testament concept of *ekklesia*.
>
> The dynamic pole is mainly found in New Testament statements which describe the church in biological, organic terms and therefore emphasize the aspect of "growth." The prime example is the way the church is characterized as the "body of Christ," and the individual Christians as parts of the body." The static element is found in statements which describe the church in terms of architectural and technical metaphors and consequently emphasize the aspect of "church building." The prime example is the way the apostle Paul characterizes himself as a "wise architect" who laid the "foundation" on which others "build." In the New Testament both approaches are present. . . .
>
> There are even a number of passages in which the two aspects are so closely intertwined in a single statement that the resulting picture–judged by standards of linear logic–seem contradictory. Examples are such phrases as "living (organic metaphor) stones (technical metaphor)," "growing (organic metaphor) into a temple (technical metaphor)," the description of the Corinthians as "God's field (organic metaphor) and God's building (technical metaphor)," or "that the body of Christ (organic metaphor) may be built up (technical metaphor)." (16)

The development of this bipolar ecclesiology provides much of the theological framework for Schwarz's approach to church health. Because this framework is so central to Schwarz's model, we will examine these aspects of the nature of the church more fully.

The church is an organization. While the church is more than an organization, at least at an operational level it possesses the characteristics of an organization. The organizational nature of the church can be seen not only from the technical metaphors that Schwarz cites but also from some of the functional instructions that are given to govern the church. Although some aspects of the church certainly transcend any human organization, many aspects of the church are common to almost any human organization.

Perhaps the central passage that expresses the church's organizational nature is 1 Corinthians 3:10. Here Paul indicates, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds." Paul's words point out a human factor in the building of the church. The admonition to be careful how we build is an indication of the importance of the builder's contribution. Building is something people have to do, and the contribution they make is so important that they must take great care to do it correctly. (Even this effort is ultimately traced back to the empowering grace of God.) This building image is further maintained by references in other passages to Christ as the cornerstone on which the church is built (Eph. 2:19-20; 1 Pet. 2:4-12).

The organizational nature of the church is also seen in the functional nature of many of the instructions to the church. When a controversy arose in the church about the care of widows in Acts 6, the church did not simply sit back and await some kind of divine provision. The apostles accepted this problem as their responsibility and proposed a very practical solution. The congregation was instructed to choose men who met certain criteria, and the responsibility of caring for the widows was to be delegated to them. This approach is similar to the approach that almost any organization might use.

Later in Acts 15, a controversy erupted in the church over what requirements were

to be made of Gentiles who come to Christ. The matter was submitted to the Jerusalem

church for resolution. Arrangements were made to hear the two sides and "much

discussion" ensued. Eventually, James stood up and expressed a position that the

apostles and elders agreed upon, and this position became the operating policy of the

church. While God certainly was working throughout this process, the process is not

unlike the mechanism for deciding policy in many organizations.

In both Acts and the Pauline Epistles, funds are collected, stored, and eventually

transferred to other congregations for disbursement. This activity demonstrates a fairly

advanced level of administrative functioning. Procedures were even instituted to insure

accountability.

In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul specifies certain qualifications for elders and

deacons. The specification of qualifications for church officers seems to indicate an

implicit formalization of the organizational nature of the church. The church had become

an organization that needed leadership, and Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus were

given to aid them in guiding the churches to select the right kind of leaders. Some of

those leaders were eventually paid because Paul made a clear case in 1 Corinthians that

"those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14).

Snyder concludes, "Some institutionalization of the Church is already evident in the New

Testament–regular meeting in homes, some patterns of leadership, the celebration of the

Lord's Supper, and apparently some prayers and confessions" (64).

Finally, although some might argue against the organizational dimension of the

church today, probably without exception, churches recognize it in their operation. They

have governing documents (a constitution or by-laws), they have officers, they have set

times for meeting, they have a form of government, they have budgets, they have bank

accounts in the name of the organization, they have tax-exempt status, and they have a

corporate name and image in the community. These characteristics and practices indicate

that although the church is more than an organization, it is an organization. Indeed, this

organizational component of the church is essential and inevitable. Snyder observes that

"all life must have form. Life without form is sick and dies; it perishes because it cannot

sustain itself. That's the way it is with all life, whether spiritual, human, or botanical"

(138).

Much of church growth writing and implementation seems to focus on the

organizational nature of the church. Such a focus is a valid application of the fact that the

church is an organization, and organizations function best when certain basic principles

and practices are observed. The problem seems to come when the organizational nature

of the church is addressed without regard to divine design that transcends a simple cause

and effect approach to church life. As Snyder points out, "Too often the churches I know

are not charismatic communities in which each person ministers according to the gifts

each has received. Rather they are little more than organizations not fundamentally

different from other organizations in the same culture" (67).

The church is an organism. Although the church is an organization, the primary

metaphors for the church depict it as an organism. While the church is both an

organization and an organism, its *distinctive* nature is organic. In his book, *The New*

Reformation, Greg Ogden asserts that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift from seeing

the church as an institution to seeing the church as an organism. He defines the church as

organism as "nothing less than a *life-pulsating people who are animated by the*

indwelling presence of Jesus Christ [original emphasis]" (29).

The New Testament is filled with different images for the church. Over ninety-

six pictures have been identified (Ogden 29). Organic metaphors include a priesthood

(1 Pet. 2:5,9), a chosen people (1 Pet. 2:9), members of God's household (Eph. 2:19),

God's field (1 Cor. 3:9), and the Bride of Christ (Matt. 25:1-13; John. 3:28-29; 2 Cor.

11:2; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 21:3-4). However, the primary organic metaphor for the church

is the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16;

4:4,12, 15-16; 5:23, 30; Col. 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15). As Peter Steinke observes in *Healthy*

Congregations—A Systems Approach, "The New Testament speaks of the church as a

living system, akin to the human body. The 'body of Christ' as a metaphor for the church

appears thirty-seven times" (viii). Because the metaphor of the church as a body

corresponds most directly with the church health model of church development, we will

focus on the body metaphor.

First, the essential manifestation of the body image is its connection with Christ.

As Ray Stedman notes, "The life of Jesus is still being manifest among people, but now

no longer through an individual physical body, limited to one place on earth, but through

a complex, corporate body called the church" (37). Similarly, Thomas Oden observes,

"Jesus is not merely the one who founded the community and left it, but rather the one

who is present to the community now . . . as the vital essence of the church" (117).

Christ is alive and working through the church, which is his hands and feet to reach out to

a world he loves.

This connection with Christ has several ramifications. Christ is the Head of the

church, and the life of the body depends on him. In Ephesians 4:15-16, Paul indicates

Christ is the head from whom "the whole body, joined and held together by every

supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Just

as a physical body is declared dead without brainwaves, the church has no life outside of

connection with the head. A church severed from Christ is "brain dead" no matter how
efficiently the organization may be functioning.

Physician Paul Brand and Philip Yancey have grasped a small sense of the
wonder of this relationship of Christ to the church through his work with the human
body. They write,

> The Head of the Body is the seat of mystery and wisdom and unity. He is
> the Source . . . Every other cell in my body ages and is replaced at least
> every seven years. My skin, eyes, heart, even bones are entirely different
> today from those I carried around just one decade ago. In all respects but
> one I am now a different person—the exception being my neurons or nerve
> cells. Never replaced, these maintain the continuity of selfhood that keeps
> the entity of Paul Brand alive. (*In His Image* 129-33)

Christ is the continuity of the body. He is the entity that keeps the body alive.

Furthermore, not only is the head the source of life, it is also the source of
direction for the body. The brain is the originator of all thought and purpose in the body.
Years ago, I participated in an experiment in an anatomy and physiology class in which
we destroyed the cerebrum of a live frog leaving the cerebellum intact. The result was
surprising but revealing. The frog could still swim and jump. In many ways it appeared
to act normally, but further observation revealed that its action was random and
purposeless.

When the church attempts to function without receiving direction from the head,
its activity may appear unaltered. It may still gather for what it calls worship and still do
acts of service. It may perform sacraments. The church may have numerous programs
and endless activity, but all its activity is useless. It is all "sound and fury, signifying
nothing." Without connection to the head, health is impossible. The church without
connection to the head is organization without organism.

Secondly, both observation and scripture indicate that there is diversity in the

body. As Robert Anderson insightfully observes, "God does not run a franchise operation. He deals with originals. There are no clones in his kingdom, only first editions" (28).

First Corinthians 12:14 plainly says, "Now the body is not made up of one part but many." As Charles Hodge observes, "The word member (part) means a constituent part having a function of its own" (256). The human body is an incredible combination of diverse parts with distinct functions. At the cellular level, all the cells in the body are virtually alike chemically, "but visually and functionally they are as different as animals in a zoo" (Brand and Yancey, *Fearfully* 28).

Incredible diversity is evident when the body of Christ is healthy. In a healthy body the young mix with the old and the rich mix with the poor. Racial and gender diversity flourishes and the great variety of spiritual gifts is free to function. Even some theological diversity is allowed appropriate expression and that diversity strengthens rather than weakens the body. As Colson points out, such diversity "provides a healthy corrective." The intellectual bent of the reformed camp is balanced by the experiential bent of the holiness movement. The freshness of the charismatic movement is balanced by the stability of more traditional churches (106). Rather than weakening the church, diversity serves to help keep the church from swinging to unhealthy extremes.

The third observation about the healthy body is that in spite of incredible diversity, there is an essential unity. First Corinthians 12:12 clearly states the case: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts: and though all of its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ." Commenting on this verse, Godet writes, "What is the human body? One and the same life spreading out into a plurality of functions each attached to one of the members (parts) of the organism, and laboring for

its preservation and well being" (635).

In the human body, this unity is preserved and transmitted by the genetic code. The DNA of every cell in the body is the same even though the function and appearance of cells are very different (Brand and Yancey, *Fearfully* 46). In the church this unity is preserved and transmitted because Christ is not only the head, he permeates the entire body. Christ is the DNA of the body of Christ. Second Corinthians 13:5 asks, "Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?" Jesus Himself clearly asserted, "I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:20).

As Ogden observes, "*The church is the container, and Jesus is the one who fills it with his life* [original emphasis]. Jesus is the content who indwells the form" (31). The presence of Christ in every member of his Body creates a bond that transcends geography, culture, class, and language. The expression of that unity can be diminished if it is not "kept" (Eph. 4:3) by the members but it can never be totally extinguished.

The final observation about the healthy body is that there is a mutual dependence. As the apostle Paul asserts, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Cor. 12:21). God has designed the body so that "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). No part of the body is self-sufficient, and no part is useless. Interdependence rather than independence is at the core of the biblical church.

MacArthur sums up this relationship well when he writes,

> The human body . . . is marvelously complex yet unified, with unparalleled harmony and interrelatedness. It is a unit; it cannot be subdivided into several bodies. If it is divided, the part that is cut off ceases to function and dies, and the rest of the body loses some of its functions and effectiveness. (*MacArthur New Testament* 310)

In the Church, the same interdependence exists. Whenever some part of the body

of Christ seeks to exist in isolation from the rest of the body, both that part and the rest of

the body suffers. The same is true in a local church. Many local churches are severely

handicapped because only the gifts and abilities of a few are being utilized.

The Interaction between Organization and Organism

Schwarz eloquently sums up the proper response to the dual nature of the church.

He asserts,

> The church as an organization can be "manufactured" by humans; the
> church as an organism cannot. We have control over the organization, but
> never the organism. . . . In natural church development, all we can do . . .
> is subject the elements we *can* [original emphasis] influence to the
> criterion of functionality in such a way that the elements that are beyond
> our control may take place. (*Paradigm* 21)

Snyder says virtually the same thing and relates the interaction between a church's

organization and organism to church growth. He writes,

> Church growth is not a matter of bringing to the Church that which is
> necessary for growth, for if Christ is there, the seeds of growth are already
> present. Rather, church growth is a matter of removing hindrances to
> growth. (119)

Possibly the greatest contribution of church health literature to the church growth

movement is its full recognition of the church as an organism. Most of the theological

criticism directed at the church growth movement and most of the abuses of church

growth practitioners seem to relate to an over-emphasis on the church as an organization

and an underemphasis on the church as an organism. An appropriate guiding principle

for keeping the organizational and organic in proper relationship is that organizational

decisions that compromise the organic identity of the church can never be made.

Whether the church health movement can find the elusive middle between these

two aspects of the church remains to be seen. Although most church health models

currently include technical components, the concept of health is an organic metaphor.

The priority of this organic metaphor may eventually predispose church health

practitioners to neglect the organizational components of health.

The Place of Pragmatism

While guarding the divine design must never be compromised, the divine design

allows for pragmatic considerations. Jesus himself admonished his disciples to consider

pragmatic factors when doing kingdom work. In Matthew 10:16, Jesus admonished his

disciples to be "as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves."

Writing on this passage D. A. Carson observes,

> They must be *phronimoi* ("shrewd") as serpents, which in several Near
> Eastern cultures were proverbial for prudence. But prudence can easily
> deteriorate into cheap cunning unless it goes with simplicity. The
> disciples must prove not only "shrewd" but *akeraioi* ("innocent") . . . Yet
> innocence becomes ignorance, even naivete, unless combined with
> prudence. (246-47)

In other words, they were to be pragmatic but never at the expense of innocence.

This dilemma of practicing the pragmatic without compromising the "innocence"

of the gospel has offered church growth advocates one of their greatest hurdles. This is

particularly true when making the leap from theory to application. Some of the greatest

enemies of the church growth movement have not been its critics but rather some of its

practitioners who have pursued growth with all the shrewdness of the serpent yet without

the innocence of the dove.

Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul endorses a pragmatic approach to the

specific work of making disciples. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, Paul asserts,

> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to
> everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to
> win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law
> (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.
> To those having the law I became like one not having the law (though I
> am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those

not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

Paul approaches the evangelization of the lost in a very pragmatic manner. As Leon Morris observes, "Where no principle was at stake he was prepared to go to extreme lengths to meet people" (138). Writing for the *NIV Application Commentary*, Craig Blomberg summarizes Paul's approach as being "to clear the ground of unnecessary obstacles that might hinder unbelievers from coming to Christ" (183). Even John MacArthur, who has been critical of aspects of the church growth movement, opens the door for pragmatic considerations in his comments on this passage. MacArthur writes,

> Paul became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. He did not compromise the gospel. . . . But he would condescend in any way for anyone if that would in any way help bring him to Christ. . . . If a person is offended by God's Word, that is his problem. If he is offended by biblical doctrine, standards, or church discipline, that is his problem. That person is offended by God. But if he is offended by our unnecessary behavior or practices–no matter how good and acceptable those may be in themselves–his problem becomes our problem. It is not a problem of law but a problem of love, and love always demands more than the law. (*MacArthur New Testament* 213)

Clearly, Paul is willing to use "all possible means" to save some. Even in this supremely pragmatic assertion however, Paul acknowledges limitations. He was never free from God's law but was always under Christ's law.

Church growth writers make virtually the same assertion as Paul. C. Peter Wagner deals directly with this issue. He writes,

> Since God's goal is clear, church growth people approach the task of accomplishing it in a fairly pragmatic way. The word "pragmatic," however, has drawn some criticism. Perhaps it is not the best word, but since it is being used, it should be explained. My dictionary defines pragmatic as "concerned with practical consequences or values." This is the way church growth understands the term. It does not mean the kind

of pragmatism that treats people as objects and dehumanizes them. It does not mean pragmatism that will compromise the doctrinal and ethical principles of God, the Bible, and the kingdom. But it does mean pragmatism as far as value-neutral methodologies are concerned. (71)

Schwarz seemingly stands in opposition to Wagner on the issue of pragmatism. He characterizes natural church development as being principle-oriented in contrast to being pragmatic and lists six dangers of pragmatism. These dangers include its rooting in a worldview that rejects binding principles, a danger of making success the ultimate theological criterion, undue concentration on short-term gain, a tendency to determine what is important in God's kingdom from their own opinion rather than Scripture, acceptance of artificial fruit, and potential opportunism (*Natural* 101-102). While these dangers certainly are ones into which church growth practitioners may fall, the pragmatism Wagner is promoting is different than the pragmatism Schwarz decries.

The problem with pragmatism is therefore not its usage but its misusage. When pragmatic considerations take precedence over the parameters of the divine design, they are ungodly. When pragmatic considerations are instituted within the divine design, they are godly, wise, and a good stewardship of the mysteries of God.

The State of the Church

Both the church growth and the church health movement are a response to the current state of the church. Historically, the Reformation might never have occurred without the decadence of the church of Luther's day. Likewise, church growth models might not have developed if most churches were growing and church health would be of little interest if most churches were healthy. Necessity again appears to have been the mother of invention.

Donald McGavran, the father of the church growth movement, documents this

connection. He says,

> My interest in church growth was first roused when Pickett's survey
> showed that 134 mission stations in mid-India (where I was a missionary)
> had experienced an average church growth of only 12 percent per decade,
> or about 1 percent per year. The ten stations of my own mission, the India
> Mission of the Disciples of Christ, were not significantly different from
> the other 124. They had a staff of over 75 missionaries and a "great work"
> –but had notably been unsuccessful in planting churches. In the town of
> Harda where my wife and I with six other missionaries worked from 1924
> to 1930, not one baptism from outside the church occurred between 1918
> and 1954, a period of thirty-six years. Lack of church growth is part of my
> own experience. (46)

While church growth literature has had a major impact on some congregations
and in some places, the state of the church is not radically different today than it was
thirty years ago when McGavran wrote his book. In his book *The Frog in the Kettle*,
George Barna notes that "attendance has remained relatively stable for the last twenty
years. Not so for membership. As the elderly pass away, they are being replaced in the
Church by generations who have less loyalty to religion, to denominations, to local
churches" (133). He also observes that the average church in America spends less than
five percent of its budget for evangelism (135), that most church growth is transfer
growth (135), and that most churches in America have fewer than one hundred people in
worship each Sunday (137). Possibly the most devastating observation was that
unchurched people increasingly see the church as irrelevant, uncaring, and lacking in
integrity (137-38).

In a later book, Barna sees the deterioration of the church increasing. This
deterioration is not only quantitative but it is also qualitative. He notes that attendance
has slumped, small groups have never really caught on, fewer people are reading their
Bibles, and the amount of time the most committed people are willing to devote to church
has fallen by half (*Second Coming* 18). He warns, "At the risk of becoming an alarmist, I

believe the Church in America has no more than five years–perhaps even less–to turn itself around and begin to affect the culture" (8).

Barna is certainly not alone in his assessment of the church. Other writers echo his words and cite different statistics. Charles Arn says that "most churches older than 30 years are having little or no impact in reaching unchurched people. . . . The worship attendance in 83 percent of all such churches in America is plateaued or in decline" (22). Amazingly, "half of the 242,000 churches that fall into this category did not add one new member through conversion" (24).

Aubrey Malphurs estimates that the number of unchurched in America may be as high as 70-80 percent. He agrees with Penny Marler that if Gallup polls that indicate that the percentage of unchurched people is only 57 percent were accurate, then people would be flocking to our churches, but they are not. He concludes that the typical church today does not understand the "full implications of megachange," and even those that do really do not "know how to respond in effective ministry to those immersed in the postmodern paradigm" (8).

Possibly the most revealing insight into the dilemma of the church today has been documented by Herrington, Bonem, and Furr in their book, *Leading Congregational Change*. In recent years, one of the few denominations that has been growing in attendance has been the Southern Baptist Convention. Amazingly, the authors found that in the 1980s, even Southern Baptist congregations lagged behind the population growth in every county in the country: "In business terms, we had been losing market share for forty years" (2-3). Hemphill, another Southern Baptist, affirms this trend across denominational lines and maintains that "church growth is not keeping up with population increases. Total members in U.S. churches increased by 28 percent from 1960

to 1990 while population increased by 39 percent" (5).

From these statistics, clearly the American church is losing ground. It is declining in both quantity and quality. The problem seems to have reached crisis proportions.

Some will insist that the church is not in as much trouble as the statistics seem to indicate. They may rightfully assert that the church will never ultimately fail because Christ promised that the gates of hell will never prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). They are right theologically, but they are wrong geographically. Christ has promised that the church will continue, but he has not promised that the church will continue in any certain location. The fact that Christ has promised that the church would prevail is a global promise not a local or national promise. Certainly, history has revealed that while the gates of hell have never extinguished the church, they certainly have prevailed in certain local assemblies, and even entire nations have seen a flourishing church become a struggling church.

The question still to be answered is whether church health is the answer or at least part of the answer to this crisis. Thirty years of experience seems to have taught us that an emphasis on church growth alone will not solve the problem. Whether this failure results from a deficiency in church growth methods or from the fact that church growth experts have been unable to gain acceptance for their methods with much of the church is immaterial. The fact remains that the emphasis on church growth has not stopped the decline of the American church. Possibly, churches that have resisted an emphasis on making the church bigger will embrace making the church better. Perhaps, a better church will become a bigger church. Certainly, "better is better," even if a church never gets much bigger.

Biblical Precedents for Church Health

Most church health writers assume the biblical legitimacy of church health. While church growth experts have often been called upon to defend their approach biblically, church health writers have not shouldered the same burden. Church health seems to be an intuitive value for many of those who are involved with church issues. Indeed, long before the present emphasis on church health, pastors and theologians were examining the health of the church.

Current church health literature is more of a derivation and modification of church growth literature than a dramatic departure. Like church growth, much of the current writing on church health is more the product of addressing the problems of the modern church rather than biblical exegesis. The components of church health are never definitively listed in scripture and therefore the biblical case for church health must be made indirectly.

Health as a Biblical Image of Spiritual Condition

While biblical support for the entity known today as church health is not explicitly stated, abundant instances of a health or sickness image used metaphorically of either a person's or nation's spiritual condition can be found. A nation or person living in disobedience to God is often seen not only as sinful but also as sick. Furthermore, while much of the healing in the Bible refers to the alleviation of some physical infirmity or disease, at times the healing is clearly of a more holistic nature and includes spiritual health.

These images are most abundant in the Old Testament. In the Pentateuch, Israel's physical health is often linked with their conformity to God's law (Exod. 23:25; Deut. 7:15; 28:58-61). In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God promises that if his people will "humble

themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, . . . I will heal their land." The psalmist acknowledged that when he kept quiet about his sin he wasted away (Ps. 32:1-5). The writer of Proverbs advises, "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. . . . This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones" (Prov. 3:5-8). The prophets often announced that the afflictions of Israel were the result of their sin against God. These prophets also promised healing if Israel would only return and do God's will (Isa. 57:17-18; 58:61; Hos. 6:1). Clearly, this healing was not just physical, it was also spiritual. For instance, in Jeremiah God promises to heal Israel of backsliding (Jer. 3:22) and to "restore your health and heal your wounds" (Jer. 30:17). Isaiah cries out to a nation living in disobedience, "Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil" (Isa. 5b-6).

Possibly, the most significant image of spiritual health in the Old Testament involves a prophecy of the work of the Suffering Servant. Isaiah says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Clearly the healing here includes more than physical healing. One commentator writes, "Peace and healing view sin in terms of the estrangement from God and the marring of the sinner himself that it causes" (Grogan 303). Another says, "Those who believe in Him . . . are healed spiritually. Ironically, his wounds, inflicted by the soldiers scourging and which were followed by his death, are the means of healing believers' wounds in salvation" (Martin 1108). Motyer says, "Isaiah uses 'healing' in a total sense: the healing of the

person, restoring fullness and completeness, a mark of the Messianic day" (431). John Oswalt observes, "The metaphors of vv.4-5 are precisely those of 1:5-6. As a result of its rebellion, the nation is desperately ill, a mass of open sores and unbandaged wounds. . . . Someone must take the disease and give back health" (387-88).

This aspect of the work of Christ resurfaces in the New Testament. Peter must have had the Isaiah passage in mind when he wrote, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). Peter is not speaking to those in need of physical healing but those who "were like sheep going astray" (1 Pet. 2:25).

While a prominent part of Christ's ministry involved physical healing, his ministry involved much more. When Christ was questioned about eating with sinners, he responded with a health image. He said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:12-13). D. A. Carson comments, "The sick need a doctor (v. 12), and Jesus healed them; likewise the sinful need mercy, forgiveness, restoration, and Jesus healed them (v. 13)" (225).

These instances reveal that although church health is not specifically delineated in the Scriptures, the image of health is common. Both the Old and New Testament speak of the spiritual condition of persons in health-related language. In the Old Testament, this image was readily applied to the people of God in their corporate identity as the nation of Israel. Church health seems to be a legitimate extension of this image to the New Testament people of God in their corporate identity as the church.

Emphasis on Quantity and Quality

As was pointed out earlier, church growth writers have not focused solely on

quantity and assuredly not quantity at the expense of principle. However, in emphasis and certainly in practice, numbers are regarded as very important. Many would assert that they are concerned with numbers because God is concerned with numbers. The recording of the number of conversions and the growth of the Jerusalem church in the book of Acts is seen by some as an endorsement of interest in numbers.

However, the biblical record is quite mixed in its treatment of numbers. While numbers are frequently recorded, more is not always seen as better. For instance, God repeatedly and drastically reduced Gideon's army before God gave him victory. Noah is viewed as an "heir of righteousness" (Heb. 11:7) even though he was only able to save his family. Elijah stands alone against the prophets of Baal in one of the greatest victories of Scripture. Certainly, size is no sure indicator of God's blessing.

One of the most problematic passages for those prone to overemphasize numbers is found in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. In these parallel passages, David sends Joab to take a census of the people, and God responds with severe judgment. Payne notes, "A census was not in itself wrong (cf. the God directed census in Num. 1 and 26). But on this occasion David seems to have ordered this because he was placing his trust in 'multiplied troops' rather than in the promises of God" (407). Merrill thinks the fact that David only counted military men indicates that David "did this so he could boast in human might" (481).

The possibilities of David's sin seem to be twofold. It was either a sin of pride or of walking by sight instead of by faith. It would seem that these passages are particularly pertinent for church growth proponents because they seem to be the very sins that those who concentrate solely on quantitative growth may easily fall into. Indeed, most of us who have regular contact with pastors have been sickened by the arrogant attitudes of

some who have experienced growth. I do not believe that this is the rule, but a regular

exception.

This evidence does not show that numerical growth is unimportant. It simply

shows that it is not all-important. As Snyder observes,

> God has called his Church to make disciples of all peoples throughout all
> lands and this implies numerical growth. Disciples are countable. Thus
> we have startling and yet very matter-of-fact recording of numerical
> growth in the book of Acts. Luke gives us enough statistics to show when
> the Spirit acts the Church grows numerically, but not enough to allow us
> to seize on numerical growth as the essence of the Church or as the only
> measure of a church's life and effectiveness. (118)

Church health seems to offer a possible corrective to the over-emphasis on quantitative

growth.

Furthermore, church health more fully recognizes the full spectrum of growth. A

church may be in a number of situations that make numerical growth unlikely but may be

growing in commitment, maturity, and godliness. Schwarz makes the case for quality

growth in *Natural Church Development* by writing,

> Goals in terms of worship attendance appears to me to be rather
> shallow . . . increased worship attendance is not the ultimate "goal," with
> everything else being a means to that end; it is a natural by-product of
> improved quality. . . . Because increased church attendance is the natural
> effect of higher quality, it follows that monitoring attendance can serve as
> a strategic instrument for "success control." . . . The point of departure for
> natural church development is, therefore, not goal setting in the area of
> quantity . . . but quality. (44-45)

Steinke makes the point even more strongly. He says,

> Organic processes are not linear. They are not merely progressive or
> expansive. Some organic processes promote growth through decay,
> shedding, and breakdown. Some organic growth is downward–a
> deepening, a rooting, a maturing process. An organic view will not allow
> us to make health synonymous with enlargement and mass. . . . At times
> health is manifested by growth in size. At other times health involves
> sheer maintenance, with little or no growth at all. . . . We do a great
> disservice to congregations whose growth is minimal, static, or even in

decline when we say they are unhealthy without regard to their stage of development or context. Most of the time whether a church expands is a matter of demographics. (viii-ix)

Clearly, while health and numerical growth are often related, they are not synonymous. A church that is hindered from growing numerically because of demographics may grow in other ways and be a very healthy congregation.

The Church as a Body

As mentioned earlier, the most frequent metaphor for the church is the body of Christ. The image of the church as a body is naturally conducive to a health approach of analyzing ministry. Steinke says, "To talk about a healthy congregation is to talk about a congregation from an organic perspective. Only organisms can be said to be healthy or diseased" (viii). One of the prime considerations for a body is its health.

Indeed, in 1 Corinthians 12 the image of health is implicit if not explicit. Verse twenty-six says, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." As Mare observes, "What happens to one part affects the well being of the whole" (265). Similarly, Odgen says,

> In describing a mutuality of suffering Paul draws a lesson from our physical body. When one part of our body hurts, the rest of the body turns its attention to the hurting part. . . . In the body of Christ, what happens to one member affects the whole. The Greek word translated "all suffer together" is *sympatheo*, which literally means to "suffer with" or "sympathize.". . . Paul says that the suffering should be spread out so it is carried by the whole community. (42)

The fact that the church is described as a body makes its health a legitimate and natural consideration. As Rick Warren observes, "Church growth is the natural result of church health" (49). The present transition from an emphasis on church growth to an emphasis on church health seems therefore to be a "healthy" trend in church life.

What is Church Health?

Health is a changing concept in today's world. There was a time that health was defined simply as an absence of disease. As Leith Anderson observes, however, "If we insist on defining health in terms of illness, we will be malady centered (128). The problem of becoming malady centered is a danger for both personal and church health.

In recent years, however, health has become a much more dynamic and positive concept. It is a measure of wellness, not just the absence of sickness. This wellness transcends mere bodily wellness and extends to the entire person. In a textbook on health, Turner and Rhodes define health as "the process of attaining spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being" (4). Similarly, Steinke says, "Health is wholeness" (vii).

Church health deals with the wholeness or wellness of the church. Traditionally, churches have been evaluated almost exclusively on their growth. The basic assumption has seemed to be that the larger the church the better the church. While few people make such statements directly, the assumption that bigger churches are better has become an unstated but almost universally practiced assumption. This assumption is regularly demonstrated through the prominence given pastors of larger churches in both church literature and conferences.

Such an approach to evaluation has numerous potential flaws. First, large churches are not necessarily strong churches. Recent church scandals have highlighted the fact that a ministry can be large and corrupt. Furthermore, large churches are not necessarily more effective. In fact, Schwarz's studies found that "church size turned out to be the strongest negative factor, on a par with factors like 'liberal theology' and 'traditionalism'" (*Natural* 46).

Secondly, growth is often dependent on factors that are outside a church's control. The demographics of the community in which a church is located can certainly be growth prohibitive. Economic factors can limit a church's ability to reach out to their surrounding community. Denominational affiliation, past reputation, and availability of facilities that allow growth can also be limiting factors.

Hemphill lists five limitations of methods and models of church growth:

1. *You can't transfer context,*

2. *You can't transfer gifts and personality,*

3. *You can't transfer spirituality,* '

4. *We can't transfer the unique gift mix of a particular congregation,* and

5. *We can't transfer time and maturation* [original emphasis] (16).

Church health is an attempt to define church success in a more holistic and possibly biblical manner than church growth alone. This approach allows for evaluating effectiveness both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is as applicable for a small church as a large church, as applicable for an urban church as a rural church, and as applicable for a church in Germany as the United States.

As positive as this potential is, admittedly the church health movement is still somewhat blurry in its identity. As the literature in this area expands, so do the lists of potential health characteristics. While definite overlap exists between the various listings of church health characteristics, a great deal of disparity is also evident. In fact, church health is as different as the number of people who write about it.

Few have given any explanation for this disparity. Most church health writers simply list their perceived components, often totally ignoring the components given by others. Possibly the best explanation for this differentiation is that just like human health,

church health is a complex and multifaceted entity. In all probability, church health cannot be fully accounted for by six factors, eight factors, ten factors, or any other specific number of factors. Church health is comprised of such a multitude of factors that no writer could include them all. Church health writers have simply enumerated some of the most prominent. Macchia, whose list is one of the few that has been compiled through a research base, says, "I recognize that our Ten Characteristics of a Healthy Church is not an exhaustive list" (15).

The fact that no list is totally comprehensive does not necessarily indicate a lack of validity for church health. No doctor gives every available test to determine if a person is healthy. A doctor usually chooses some primary tests and makes a preliminary diagnosis on the basis of those tests. Most doctors will record a patient's weight, blood pressure, pulse and temperature. One doctor may then take blood tests. Another may order x-rays. A third may get a urine sample. The tests the doctor orders are dependent on the doctor's training, the patient's stage of life, what illnesses are prominent at the time, and sometimes just the doctor's basic intuition as he or she conducts the examination.

Diagnosis may be the primary use of church health listings. They serve as primary tests that can give a preliminary diagnosis to indicate areas that are doing well and those that are doing poorly. Certain characteristics are like pulse and blood pressure. They appear in almost every list. Other characteristics may be of more value in certain places and at certain times.

Because of this variety, specific statements that apply to all church health assessments are limited. There are however, two general characteristics that seem to be universal. These are

1. Church health is derived from a multi-factorial listing of church

characteristics. The most prominent, common characteristic of church health writing is some sort of listing of characteristics. Indeed, Kennon Callahan's book *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* could be classified as a church health book even though he does not use the health metaphor in describing his list. His concept of effectiveness is close to what others are calling health.

2. Church health is qualitative in nature. This qualitative emphasis does not mean that church health proponents are uninterested in quantitative growth. Indeed, church health writing appears for the most part to grow out of church growth literature. Church health however focuses on the qualitative characteristics that may make growth more likely.

Non-Research Based Models of Church Health

Models of church health seem to be exploding. An exhaustive list is virtually impossible to produce because they are originating from so many different sources and are constantly being produced. In this section, some of the more prominent models that are not based on documented research and their distinctives will be discussed.

Kennon L. Callahan–*Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*

Dr. Callahan published his work before the current emphasis on church health became popular. However, his listing of components that contribute to the effectiveness of the church is very similar to what current authors are calling church health. Callahan's background is as a church consultant, and his list is the result of work "with over seven hundred and fifty churches" and his acquaintance with "several thousand other churches in a wide range of denominations" (xii). He has developed a list of twelve characteristics:

1. Specific, Concrete Missional Objectives,

2. Pastoral and Lay Visitation,

3. Corporate, Dynamic Worship,

4. Significant Relational Groups,

5. Strong Leadership Resources,

6. Streamlined Structure and Solid, Participatory Decision Making,

7. Several Competent Programs and Activities,

8. Open Accessibility,

9. High Visibility,

10. Adequate Parking, Land, and Landscaping,

11. Adequate Space and Facilities, and

12. Solid Financial Resources (vii).

Callahan divides his list of twelve characteristics into two groups of six. Six

characteristics he calls functional and six he calls relational (xii). Callahan's twofold

division is similar to the static and dynamic poles or organizational and organism division

made by Schwarz. He delineates three very interesting principles in regards to this

division:

1. The relational characteristics are the sources of satisfaction in a
   congregation.
2. The functional characteristics, if they are not in place, are the sources
   of *dis*satisfaction in a congregation.
3. There is no direct correlation between the two (xiv).

Callahan believes that most pastors "regrettably" focus on lowering the levels of

dissatisfaction rather than raising the levels of satisfaction (xiv). He believes this

emphasis on the functional at the expense of the relational fails to raise the satisfaction of

congregations and results in pastors being asked to move from congregation to

congregation (xv). He indicates "generally speaking, effective, successful churches have

nine of these twelve characteristics . . . the majority of the nine are relational rather than functional" (xii).

In one area, Callahan seems to run counter to the conclusions of Schwarz. While Schwarz advocates giving attention to "minimum factors" (*Natural* 40-57), Callahan makes a strong case for "building on strengths" (xvii). Actually, the approaches are not as different as they may appear. Schwarz's advice to "combine both approaches" (57) by using current strengths to strengthen weaknesses defines a middle ground that is consistent with Callahan's recommendations.

The "watershed" issue as Callahan sees it is, "Do you believe that your best years are behind you, or do you believe that your best years are yet before you?" (xx). Effective churches see their best years as yet to come. Ineffective churches believe their best years are behind them.

Robert E. Logan–*Beyond Church Growth*

Dr. Logan comes from a background that includes both church planting and pastoring a local church. At the time of the publication of his book, *Beyond Church Growth*, he was the vice president for new church development with Church Resource Ministries. His diverse background gives him a unique perspective because he has worked with the church from both the inside and the outside.

He has been involved with the church growth movement and is still "fully committed" to it. However, he recognizes that some pastors have rejected church growth thinking and believes they "will appreciate the focus on church health." He continues, "Effective churches are healthy churches; healthy churches are growing churches–they make more and better disciples" (17). He believes that God "desires that churches grow both qualitatively and quantitatively so that the Gospel of the kingdom will spread to the

uttermost ends of the earth" (18). Interestingly, though he speaks of church health, he

calls his principles "church-growth principles" (19). He lists ten:

1. Visioning Faith and Prayer,

2. Effective Pastoral Leadership,

3. Culturally Relevant Philosophy of Ministry,

4. Celebrative and Reflective Worship,

5. Holistic Disciple Making,

6. Expanding Network of Cell Groups,

7. Developing and Resourcing Leaders,

8. Mobilizing Believers According to Spiritual Gifts,

9. Appropriate and Productive Programming, and

10. Starting Churches that Reproduce (7).

George G. Hunter–"Top Ten Features of the 'Apostolic Congregation'"

Dr. Hunter is the Dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and

Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has long been both a proponent and

significant contributor to the church growth movement. Along with Logan, his listing

clearly shows that church growth writers are not averse to qualitative measures or the

church health movement. They seem to see church health as an extension not a

contradiction of the church growth movement.

Hunter promotes what he calls the "apostolic church." He defines an apostolic

church as a church whose leaders feel called to reach the unchurched, whose theology

and message center on the apostolic gospel, who adapt to the language and culture of

their target population, and who are similar in key features to early apostolic Christianity

and subsequent apostolic movements (28). He gives ten features of such *congrecgations*:

1. They take a redundant approach to rooting believers and seekers in Scripture,

2. They are disciplined and earnest in prayer, and they expect and experience God's action in response,

3. They understand, like, and have compassion for lost, unchurched, pre-Christian people,

4. They obey the Great Commission—more as a warrant or privilege than mere duty,

5. They have a motivationally sufficient vision for what people as disciples can become,

6. They adapt to the language, music, and style of the target population's culture,

7. They labor to involve everyone in small groups,

8. They prioritize the involvement of all Christians in small groups,

9. The members of these churches receive regular pastoral care, and

10. They engage in many ministries to unchurched non-Christian people (29-32).

Rick Warren–*The Purpose Driven Church*

Possibly the most popular model for health is Rick Warren's model. Churches have successfully reproduced it across America. Rick Warren is a pastor who not only has written about "the purpose driven church" but who continues to model it in his highly visible ministry at Saddleback Valley Community Church. Warren believes that the "key issue for churches in the twenty-first century will be church *health*, not church growth" (17). His basic premise is that a church ought to know its purpose and act and organize in agreement with that purpose. He proposes five fairly simple components for a healthy church:

1. They grow *warmer* through fellowship,

2. They grow *deeper* through discipleship,

3. They grow *stronger* through worship,

4. They grow *broader* through ministry, and

5. They grow *larger* through evangelism (49).

Leith Anderson—*A Church for the 21st Century*

Like Warren, Leith Anderson is a popular pastor. He points out that the twenty-first century church will not thrive by doing the same things in the same way as the twentieth century church. He introduces a formula for a changed church. It is

(Diagnosis + Prescription) Hard Work + Power of God = Changed Church (12).

Understanding the characteristics of a healthy church is essential for making the proper diagnosis and selecting the proper prescription. He lists the following characteristics of a healthy church:

1. Glorify God,

2. Produce disciples,

3. Exercise spiritual gifts,

4. Relating positively to one's environment,

5. Reproduce,

6. Incorporate newcomers,

7. Openness to change, and

8. Trust God (129-140).

Dale Galloway—"Ten Characteristics of a Healthy Church, Plus One"

Dr. Galloway is currently the dean of the Beeson Institute at Asbury Theological Seminary. Before coming to Asbury, he was founder and senior pastor of New Hope

Community Church in Portland, Oregon, which grew to 6,400 members under his leadership. Galloway is in a unique position to evaluate church health because he has a background as a pastor, and his current position allows him to be in constant contact with many of the innovative and growing churches throughout America. He has also had extensive contact with the largest churches in the world through his numerous trips to Korea. He lists ten characteristics of a healthy church:

1. A Clear-Cut Vision,

2. Passion for the Lost,

3. Shared Ministry,

4. Empowered Leaders,

5. Fervent Spirituality,

6. A Flexible and Functional Structure,

7. Celebrative Worship,

8. Connections in Small Groups,

9. Seeker-Friendly Evangelism, and

10. Loving Relationships (*Relevant* 25-44).

Galloway adds a final factor that actually applies to the other ten characteristics: Every church should be evaluated continually.

Ken Hemphill–*The Antioch Effect*

Hemphill is the president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a recognized authority on church growth. He maintains that the emphasis in church growth on "methods, models, and marketing strategies" is misplaced. Instead, he insists that church growth is "*the by-product of a right relationship with the Lord of the church* [original emphasis]" (10). He insists that "when a church falls deeply in love with Jesus,

most issues of church growth resolve themselves" (18).

The uniqueness of Hemphill's approach to church health is that he gleans his

principles from a biblical model. He maintains that the church at Antioch, where the

disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26), is a worthy example of a healthy

church. He sees this church as the "center of much of the mission activity recorded in the

book of Acts" (13). Hemphill enumerates eight "characteristics of highly effective

churches" from the Antioch model:

1. Supernatural Power,

2. Christ-exalting Worship,

3. God-connecting Prayer,

4. Servant Leaders,

5. Kingdom Family Relationships,

6. God-sized Vision,

7. Passion for the Lost, and

8. Maturation of Believers (vii).

Bob Russell –*When God Builds a Church*

Bob Russell is the pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

His church is one of the largest and fastest growing churches in America. He has pastored

at Southeast Christian since 1966 and has seen it grow from an attendance of 125 to

nearly fourteen thousand. Russell's long tenure at his church gives him some unique

insights into church growth and church health.

In spite of his success in building a mega-church, Russell is quick to point out that

"God doesn't define success in the same terms we do. . . . He measures effectiveness in

terms of faithfulness to His Word, conformity to Jesus Christ, and ministry to those in

need" (8). Russell indicates that his "primary concern is that people grow in Christ" (9).

He enumerates ten principles for growing a dynamic church:

1. Truth—Proclaim God's Word and Apply It to People's Lives;

2. Worship—Worship God Every Week in Spirit and Truth;

3. Leadership—Develop Christ-centered Leaders Who Lead by Example;

4. Excellence—Do Your Best in Every Area of Service;

5. Faith—Be Willing to Step Out with a Bold Faith and Take Risks;

6. Harmony—Maintain a Spirit of Harmony;

7. Participation—Expect the Congregation to Participate in Every Ministry;

8. Fellowship—Continually Practice Agape Love for One Another;

9. Stewardship—Give Generously of God's Resources as a Church and as

Individuals; and

10. Evangelism —Commit Enthusiastically to Evangelism as Your Primary Mission

(vii).

Mark Dever–*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*

Dever is senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and

this church health book reads more like a series of sermons than a discussion of church

health. He says, "This book, then, is a plan for recovering biblical preaching and church

leadership at time when too many congregations are languishing in a merely notional and

nominal Christianity, with all the resulting pragmatism and pettiness" (11). Dever's book

is almost a reaction to current church health literature rather than an addition to it. He

seems concerned that churches have departed from a biblical understanding of various

doctrines and gives the impression that all that a church needs is to get back to those

understandings and God will take care of the health of the church. He addresses these

issues from a strong Calvinist perspective.

While much of what Dever has to say is beneficial, he appears to suffer from what Schwarz would call a spiritualistic paradigm. He seems to be on a quest for what he sees as biblical orthodoxy at the expense of practical considerations. One helpful feature of his book is an appendix with a rather large listing of church health writers and their respective health characteristics. Dever's nine marks of a healthy church include

1. Expostional Preaching,

2. Biblical Theology,

3. The Gospel,

4. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion,

5. A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism,

6. A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership,

7. Biblical Church Discipline,

8. A Concern for Discipleship and Growth, and

9. Biblical Church Leadership (5).

George Barna–*The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*

George Barna is a church researcher. In the acknowledgements given at the beginning of his book he thanks "the many churches, pastors, and Christians across the nation who shared their time, experience and insights with me as we conducted this *research* [emphasis mine]" (*Habits* 9). Because Barna is a church researcher and because he indicates that this project was the product of research, this book could have been included as a research-based model of church health. Certainly, Barna has consistently offered valuable insights into the operation of the church for a number of years and should be considered an "expert" on the characteristics of the American church.

However, Barna's research seems markedly different than that of Macchia or Schwarz, so

it is included in this section. Barna's nine habits include:

1. Ensuring that Leaders Direct the Church,

2. Structuring the Church for Impact,

3. Building Lasting, Significant Relationships,

4. Facilitating Genuine Worship,

5. Engaging in Strategic Evangelism,

6. Facilitating Systematic Theological Growth,

7. Holistic Stewardship,

8. Serving the Community, and

9. Equipping the Family (7).

Peter Steinke–*Healthy Congregations*

Healthy Congregations is unlike any of the other church health assessments.

Steinke is a Lutheran pastor and serves as a nationwide church consultant with the Alban

Institute. He uses a systems approach to address church health. He works almost entirely

off the organic metaphor, and his factors have not grown out of the church growth

paradigm. His approach is so unique that the validity of including his writing in this type

of discussion of church health is questionable. Nevertheless, he has some unique insights

into the healthy congregation that are extremely valuable. He does not list church health

factors as other writers do but gives "Ten Principles of Health and Disease" (15). These

are

1. Wholeness is not attainable;

2. Illness is the necessary compliment to health;

3. The body has innate healing abilities;

4. Agents of disease are not causes of disease;

5. All illness is biopsychosocial;

6. The subtle precedes the gross;

7. Every body is different;

8. A healthy circulatory system is the keystone of health and healing;

9. Breathing properly is nourishing to the whole body; and

10. The brain is the largest secreting organ of the body, the health maintenance

organization (HMO) of the body (15).

Other Miscellaneous Models

A few other models have some level of prominence. In *The Second Coming of the Church*, George Barna lists six "pillars of the church." These include worship, evangelism, service, education and training, building community, and stewardship (89). In the December 1995 "Pastor to Pastor" newsletter, H. B. London lists seven guidelines for a healthy church: biblically based, mutually concerned, socially connected, community saturated, financially stable, clearly understood vision, and positive outlook (1-2). The Evangelical Free Church of America lists "ten leading indicators" of church health on their website. These are

1. Centrality of God's Word,

2. Passionate Spirituality,

3. Fruitful Evangelism,

4. High Impact Worship,

5. Mission and Vision Driven,

6. Leadership Development,

7. Church Planting,

8. Financial Stewardship,

9. Intentional Disciplemaking, and

10. Loving Relationships (Evangelical Free Web Site, *Church Health Check Up*).

Research-Based Models of Church Health

While most church health writers have based their factors on intuition,

observation, or scripture, two writers have combined these with testing to give a research

base for evaluating results. The great advantage of a research base is that if the research

is well done, it gives greater confidence about the validity of the factors being measured.

As will be seen later, this research has its critics, but it should be seen as a step forward in

objectifying the pursuit of church health. The writers who have gathered a research base

in support of their health characteristics are Stephen Macchia and Christian Schwarz.

Stephen A. Macchia–*Becoming a Healthy Church*

Stephen Macchia has served on a local church staff and is currently president of

Vision New England. Vision New England describes itself on its website as "a cutting-

edge ministry that brought believers and churches together for evangelism and renewal"

(Vision New England Web site, *Introducing*). It includes more than five thousand

churches in eighty denominations and expresses its vision as "to see New England

transformed by Jesus Christ" (Vision New England Web site, *Introducing*).

Macchia indicates that *Becoming a Healthy Church* is the outgrowth of

"discussions, several years of field testing, and two major surveys" (14). The Vision

New England web site specifies that the first survey was taken in 1997 and included

1,899 volunteer guests at Congress '97 who completed the 10-15 minute Church Attitude

Survey and the second survey included 1,855 volunteer guests at Congress '98 who took

the same survey (*1998 Executive Summary*). The survey they administered is available

on their web site. While the documentation of results is helpful, it must be remembered

that the surveys were confined to the New England area and surveys conducted in other

areas may yield different results.

Macchia's listing is one of the more recent contributions to the field of church

health. His ten characteristics do not include the Scriptures and prayer as separate

categories because "we believed it would indicate that the Bible and prayer are distinct

aspects. . . . Instead . . . the centrality of the Bible and prayer is in every one of the ten

characteristics" (18). Since prayer and the Scriptures are included by other church health

writers as distinct characteristics, Macchia actually recognizes twelve characteristics.

Three levels of importance and relevance were detected in the respondents'

ratings. The ten characteristics are ranked and grouped in their respective levels with

mean scores (on a nine-point scale) listed below (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1
Macchia's Church Health Characteristics

Level 1: How I Relate to God	
1. God's Empowering Presence	8.78
2. God-Exalting Worship	8.43
3. Spiritual Disciplines	8.31
Level 2: How I Relate to My Church Family	
4. Learning and Growing in Community	8.21
5. A Commitment to Loving and Caring Relationships	8.19
6. Servant Leadership Development	8.02
Level 3: How My Church Ministers and Manages	
7. An Outward Focus	7.90
8. Wise Administration and Accountability	7.56
9. Networking with the Body of Christ	7.03
10. Stewardship and Generosity	6.94

Source: Macchia 23

Christian A. Schwarz–*Natural Church Development*

Natural Church Development is a significant development for optimizing the

work of the church. It is the first work to bring an extensive research base to bear on the

issue of church development. Schwarz gathered data from over one thousand churches in

thirty-two countries and generated 4.2 million responses. He claims, "One of the most

important criteria for our research project was a high scientific standard . . . with rigorous

standards for objectivity, reliability, and validity" (19).

Besides this noteworthy research base, another important contribution that

Schwarz offers to ecclesiology is a "bipolar concept." Schwarz's bipolar concept is

derived from the law of polarity that "states for every force there must be a counterforce"

(84). Schwarz contends that church practitioners have tended to fall into two different

paradigms in their approach to church work. Some fall into a "technocratic paradigm"

that tends to overestimate the significance of institutions, programs, and methods. At the

opposite pole is a "spiritualistic paradigm" that tends to underestimate the importance of

institutions, programs, and methods (*Natural* 14).

Schwarz offers a new paradigm that he believes brings a biblical balance to

church development. He calls this a "biotic paradigm." He advocates that churches

should "not attempt to 'manufacture' church growth, but rather to release the biotic

potential which God has put into every church. It is our task to minimize the obstacles to

growth" (*Natural* 10). When we minimize the obstacles for growth, growth occurs "all-

by-itself" (*12*).

Schwarz's research indicated that growth was often limited by a "minimum

factor." He maintains "that the growth of a church is blocked by the quality

characteristics that are the least developed" (*Natural* 50). Like a barrel that can only be filled to the level of its shortest stave, a church can only grow to the capacity of its minimum factor. One of the most fascinating observations of his research was that when the qualitative level of each characteristic was at least 65, quantitative growth always occurred. He calls this the 65 hypothesis (*Natural* 40).

Schwarz's research isolated eight quality characteristics:

1. Empowering leadership,

2. Gift-oriented ministry,

3. Passionate spirituality,

4. Functional structures,

5. Inspiring worship services,

6. Holistic small groups,

7. Need-oriented evangelism, and

8. Loving relationships (4).

Because Schwarz's model is a primary tool of this research project, we will examine each of these components briefly at the conclusion of this chapter.

In addition to listing the quality characteristics, Schwarz gives ten action steps to help a church address its individual needs. These are

1. Build spiritual momentum,

2. Determine your minimum factor,

3. Set qualitative goals,

4. Identify obstacles,

5. Apply biotic principles,

6. Exercise your strengths,

7. Utilize biotic tools,

8. Monitor effectiveness,

9. Address your new minimum factors, and

10. Multiply your church (*Natural* 103-124).

Criticism of *Natural Church Development*

Schwarz's work has been interpreted by some church growth proponents as an attack, and some of them have returned the fire. Daniel Simpson, writing for *The Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, was "troubled by the somewhat arrogant tone"(58). Simpson notes that one of the translators of Schwarz's book believes this arrogance is more of a translation problem than an attitude problem.

Simpson believes that what Schwarz is saying is really at the "heart of the Church Growth Movement" (60). He points out that "the crux of Donald McGavran's thinking [was] 'Why do some churches grow, and others do not?'" (63). Simpson goes on to make a couple of insightful criticisms of Schwarz work. The first is that Schwarz sets up straw men and then "blows them away" (61). Schwarz clearly has a tendency to make strong statements without any attribution and then give his "more balanced" or "more biblical" approach.

In a reply to Simpson's article in the same issue of the *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, Schwarz says that his book targeted those who have heard about church growth and have a negative opinion of it ("Response" 72). He contends that he represents church growth thinking "as it is in the hearts and heads of a lot of people," and that is why he writes without quotations (73). Schwarz could have, and should have, done a better job of giving a more balanced picture of his opposition.

Maybe the strongest criticism Simpson levels is that Schwarz tends to "give the

impression that his massive empirical research project establishes the definitive list of universal church growth principles" (63). As was stated earlier in this paper, church health is an incredibly complex entity, and it is doubtful that there is a single definitive list of health characteristics. Simpson also takes issue with Schwarz's association of church growth with technocratic thinking (67), but he concludes that "Schwarz has written a must-read book for any serious student of church growth" (69).

Far more serious criticism has come from John Ellas and Flavil Yeakley in a later issue of the *Journal of the American Society of Church Growth*. They believe *Natural Church Development* "is fatally flawed by the pseudo-scientific way the material is presented" (83). An obvious flaw in Schwarz's work, Ellas and Yeakley contend, is the fact that Schwarz does not provide enough information for other researchers to replicate his study which is a serious violation of the scientific principle of replication (83). Ellas and Yeakley also point out that "significance levels are not reported" (84). Significance levels indicate the probability of the results occurring by chance and are a standard part of scientific research. A similar omission is that the correlation coefficients for places where Schwarz claims to have found strong correlations are not given (85).

One of the strongest criticisms is that the study

> can only be described as a correlational study and one cannot make causal inferences on the basis of correlation. It may be, as Schwarz suggests, that the eight quality characteristics cause numerical church growth. But it is also possible that in churches that are growing numerically, members are more likely to have positive perceptions about the eight quality characteristics. In that case, numerical church growth would be the cause and the good evaluations on the eight quality characteristics would be the effect. Another possibility is that both qualitative and quantitative growth are caused by some other variable. (86)

Ellas and Yeakley go on to point out that Schwarz himself admits that before Christoph Schalk agreed to coordinate the project, there were weaknesses that Schalk had

to correct, but Schwarz gives no indication whether or not he discarded this discredited data (86-87). Further Schwarz claims that his questionnaire scientifically measures the eight quality characteristics, but there is no documentation of the reliability or the validity of the questionnaire (88-89). Ellas and Yeakley conclude that although Schwarz's claims to have a scientific approach, his approach is really "pseudo-scientific." They insist that Schwarz's claim to have discovered universal principles of church growth is a grandiose claim that has not been demonstrated.

Ellas and Yeakley have raised some serious concerns that need to be addressed by the *Natural Church Development* organization. Some of these criticisms may be addressed by merely making the statistical analyses they have completed more readily available. Other areas of weakness may require more testing and more solid analysis. Nonetheless, even with these potential weaknesses, Schwarz's study is still the strongest step taken to date towards quantifying and objectifying church health characteristics. Part of the purpose of this study will be to measure its effectiveness in producing qualitative and quantitative growth in a specific congregation.

Eight Quality Characteristics

Because Schwarz's eight quality characteristics will be used in this study to assess the health of Rockledge Baptist Church, we will take a brief look at each of the characteristics. As previously noted, a variety of other characteristics may be useful in evaluating a church's health. However, we will limit this discussion to the characteristics isolated by Schwarz. Furthermore, since each of these characteristics could be the subject of an entire dissertation, our discussion will be somewhat foundational and cursory.

Empowering Leadership

John Maxwell says, "Everything rises and falls on leadership" (*Developing within* ii). Indeed leadership is listed as an essential health quality by most church health writers (Callahan 41-53; Logan 38-58; Galloway, "Ten" 31-33; Hemphill 73-101; EFCA; Barna, *Habits* 27-55; Macchia 115-34; Dever 205-29; Russell 73-105). The apostle Paul placed a high priority on leadership. In his letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 3) and Titus (Tit. 1), Paul went to great lengths to spell out the qualities that are expected of spiritual leaders. His specific mandate to Timothy was, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). Clearly, leadership is an essential part of a healthy church.

The leadership cited by church health writers is not positional. At its most basic level, it is influence (Maxwell, *Developing within* 1). A more extensive but still succinct definition cited by Macchia comes from J. W. McLean and William Weitzel. They say that leadership is:

1. A person,

2. involved in a process,

3. of influencing and developing a group of people,

4. in order to accomplish a purpose, and

5. by means of supernatural power (qtd. in Macchia 120-21).

Leadership alone is not what Schwarz cites as essential, leadership must be empowering. He writes,

> The key distinction is probably best expressed by the word
> "empowerment." Leaders of growing churches concentrate on
> empowering other Christians for ministry. They do not use lay workers as
> "helpers" in attaining their own goals and fulfilling their own visions.
> Rather, they invert the pyramid of authority so that the leader assists

Christians to attain the spiritual potential God has for them. (*Natural* 22)

John Maxwell, includes the "law of empowerment" as one of his 21 irrefutable

laws of leadership. He says, "The people's capacity to achieve is determined by their

leader's ability to empower" (*21 Irrefutable* 126). Maxwell believes that a desire for job

security, resistance to change, and lack of self-worth are the primary barriers to

empowerment (126-27).

Empowerment certainly seems to be consistent with Paul's indication of the

purpose of leadership given in Ephesians 4:11-12. Paul writes, "It was he who gave

some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors

and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service* [emphasis mine] so that the

body of Christ may be built up." God clearly gave certain leaders to the church to equip

or empower others for ministry. As Ogden observes, "Equipping is not to be the latest

fad in ministry; it is not something a few are called to do. It is a fundamental approach

that needs to be integral to the identity of anyone who is a pastor" (97).

Today, many seem to be pointing the church back to this healthier style of

leadership that empowers laity for the work of the ministry. Ogden characterizes this

emphasis on equipping the saints for ministry as a new reformation that completes "the

logical corollary to the priesthood of all believers" that was discovered but never fully

implemented in the Protestant Reformation (11-12). Nelson asserts, "The mental concept

of an ordained person feeding, shepherding, counseling, and basically running the church

is fading" (18). Leadership in healthy churches is not primarily doing, it is equipping

others for doing.

The fact that so many churches produce so few competent workers shows that

empowering for ministry does not occur automatically. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr

state that

> many things stand in the way of empowerment. In some churches it is the
> fear of delegation because 'no one else will do it right.' Others have a
> culture in which the paid staff is expected to do all the work... In many
> cases, this orientation is taught in seminary, expected by the congregation,
> modeled by other pastors, and confirmed by previous (disastrous)
> experiences. (71)

In the face of such obstacles, empowering others must be valued and a plan must

be formulated for implementing it. Blanchard, Hybels, and Howard in *Leadership by the*

Book give some simple but practical steps for equipping others:

1. Tell them what to do;

2. Show them what to do;

3. Let them try;

4. Observe their performance; and then

5. Praise their progress, or redirect (176).

John Maxwell gives some additional, practical ideas to provide growth opportunities for

potential leaders. He suggests,

1. Expose the potential leader to people successful in his field;

2. Provide a secure environment where the potential leader is free to take risks;

3. Provide the potential leader with an experienced mentor;

4. Provide the potential leader with the tools and resources he needs; and

5. Spend the time and money to train the potential leader in his areas of need

(Leaders around 26-27).

Clearly, a healthy church needs leadership. The Bible from Genesis to Revelation

includes example after example of godly leaders who made a significant difference in the

lives and mission of the people of God. The leadership that is most effective today in

helping the church accomplish its God-ordained mission is empowering leadership.

Gift-oriented Ministry

Far too often in the church, members are merely given jobs without any

consideration of whether they have what it takes to be effective in a specific position.

They simply fill ministry slots. The result has often been both poor service and

dissatisfied servants. The biblical answer to this dilemma is spiritual gifts. Schwarz

observes that "probably no factor influences the contentedness of Christians more than

whether they are utilizing their gifts or not" (*Natural* 24). He goes on to say, "None of

the eight quality characteristics showed nearly as much influence on both personal and

church life as 'gift-oriented ministry'" (*Natural* 24). Galloway confirms that

> every cutting-edge church today is high on giving lay people permission to
> do ministry in accordance with their spiritual gifts. . . . [They] help people
> discover their gifts and place them in service opportunities according to
> their giftedness instead of just filling jobs. ("Ten" 30)

Unsurprisingly therefore, gift-oriented ministry is listed as a distinct health characteristic

by a number of church health writers (Galloway, "Ten" 29-31; Hunter 32: Logan 160-72;

L. Anderson 131-32; Russell 173-93).

The biblical teaching on spiritual gifts is centered in four passages: Romans 12:3-

8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:7-13; and, 1 Peter 4:7-11. Ogden observes,

> The Greek word for "gifts" is *charismata*, from which we get our word
> "charismatic." The root of *charismata* is *charis*, which means "grace."
> So charismata are literally "grace-gifts" that come with the package of
> salvation. I like to look at spiritual gifts as the tangible, manifest
> expression of the love of God for us. (41)

In other words, God's grace not only saves us but also gives us at least one gift that the

entire body needs. By gifting believers for service in his kingdom God extends the

dignity of genuine usefulness to every believer.

Many believe that spiritual gifts are a special endowment for ministry that is imparted at salvation. However, Robert Anderson believes spiritual gifts start with a person's natural talents and abilities. The Holy Spirit takes these natural talents and abilities "baptizes them, and begins to use them for the edification of the church" (97). Gilbert Bilezikian seems to strike a middle ground when he defines spiritual gifts as "competencies, skills, and talents that are energized or generated by the Holy Spirit in order to be used for the common good" (80).

The truth is that while spiritual gifts are an important aspect of church health, our understanding of them is somewhat imprecise. George Hunter observes, "The understanding of spiritual gifts is not uniform or systematic in the New Testament. . . . Furthermore, the doctrine of spiritual gifts is not a 'heavyweight' doctrine; it lacks the 'explanatory power' of, say, the doctrine of the Trinity" (131). Gordon Fee agrees,

> This is an area, however, where there is also great diversity in understanding, both among scholars and within church contexts. The primary reason for this diversity is the basic assumption by most that Paul is intending to give *instruction* [original emphasis] on the meaning and use of *charismata* in the various passages in his letters where this word occurs. What we have in fact is *correction* [original emphasis] aimed at particular problems in particular churches; it is not systematic, nor does it cover all bases. (164)

Fee warns that much of the current emphasis on spiritual gifts is a fad. His problems with this "fad" include

> taking the texts out of context, rearranging the gifts under our own convenient groupings . . . and focusing on discovering what the Corinthians would have known by experience. But the greatest problem for me is the nearly universal tendency to divorce the list of "Spirit manifestations" (Paul's own term in context) in I Corinthians 12:8-10 from its clear setting of Christian worship. (163)

Bearing Fee's warning in mind lest we reduce to clarity a biblical concept that is not completely clear, the application of our understanding of spiritual gifts to service in

the church is somewhat overdue. Although spiritual gifts are a somewhat popular topic today, "there is much more talk about spiritual gifts in some churches than there is of using them for serving the body of Christ" (Gangel 127). Indeed, Logan has found that far more pastors have preached on spiritual gifts than have implemented any systematic approach to teach all new members about spiritual gifts, help them discern their gifts, and guide them into ministry in light of their gifts. He concludes, "Most Christians are educated far beyond their obedience" (163). Schwarz says his surveys indicate that "80 percent of committed Christians do not know their spiritual gift" (*Paradigm* 185).

While some ambiguity exlists in our understanding of spiritual gifts, there are a number of principles that can be drawn from Scripture about them.

1. Gifts differ but there is a common source (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

2. Each believer is given a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7a).

3. Gifts are given for the common good—that is, the good of the entire body, not just the individual (1 Cor. 12:7b; Eph. 4:12-13; 1 Pet. 4:10).

4. The Spirit of God determines which gift any believer receives (1 Cor. 12:11).

5. All the gifts are necessary (1 Cor. 12:14-20).

6. God arranges the gifts as he desires (1 Cor. 12:18).

7. Gifts should never lead to division or feelings of superiority or inferiority (1 Cor. 12:21-25; Rom. 12: 3; Eph. 4:13).

8. Gifts make the parts of the body interdependent (1 Cor. 12:26; Rom. 12:4-6).

9. No single gift is possessed by all nor does anyone have all the gifts (1 Cor. 12:27-31).

10. Gifts must be exercised with love or they are useless (1 Cor. 13).

11. Members must be willing to allow the gifts of others to be exercised in the

church (1 Cor. 14: Rom. 12:6-8).

      12. Order must be maintained in the exercise of gifts (1 Cor. 14).

      13. Leaders are given the responsibility of equipping God's people in using their gifts for God's service (Eph. 4:8-13).

      The greatest challenge of spiritual gifts is helping individual believers discover their gifts and matching those gifts with appropriate ministry opportunities. A number of churches are using various spiritual gift inventories to help people find their spiritual gifts. These inventories may be helpful in giving some initial direction but probably tend to be overvalued. I agree with Rick Warren that most of these inventories have limited usefulness. Warren gives three objections to these inventories: inventories and tests require standardization, and this denies the unique ways God works in lives; the definitions of various gifts are arbitrary and speculative; and Christian maturity may be mistaken for giftedness (371). Additionally, many believe the lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible are representative not exhaustive, and therefore, there may be many spiritual gifts not included in any spiritual gifts survey. Furthermore, the possibility of respondents marking items as they wish they were rather than as they really are, can give misleading results. Finally, one of the greatest problems is that people who take them often expect too much from them. They assume that the results of the test are accurate and all inclusive. As a result, most of us have faced people who cannot teach but are convinced they have the gift of teaching or who are administrative nightmares but believe they have the gift of administration because that is what their "test results" indicate.

      The process of determining spiritual gifts accurately will probably require a good bit more than administering an inventory. It usually will require a plan and a good bit of individual attention. The process should probably include the following factors:

1. Teach them about spiritual gifts;

2. Ask what they enjoy doing (R. Anderson 98);

3. Ask what they want to do (Logan 168);

4. Find what results come from their serving in specific areas (R. Anderson 99);

5. Determine whether additional training is needed (R. Anderson 99);

6. Determine what others say about their ability in this area (Logan 168);

7. Provide an atmosphere of grace that promotes experimentation and risk

(Ogden 132); and,

8. Encourage people whose current ministry does not correspond to their

spiritual gifts to leave that area of ministry as soon as possible (Schwarz, *Paradigm* 185).

After a person's area of spiritual giftedness has been determined, he/she must then

be matched with an appropriate ministry opportunity. Schwarz found that matching a

person with a ministry corresponding to their gifting is the point where many churches

that help people discover their spiritual gifts fail (*Paradigm* 185). Nothing less than an

intentional and pervasive plan for implementation will consistently plug people into an

appropriate ministry area. Such a plan requires an immense amount of commitment,

time, and attention. However, the benefits of having people ministering in their area of

giftedness will much more than repay the effort invested, both in the quality of ministry

and the satisfaction of the ministers.

Passionate Spirituality

God's people are always tempted to attempt to do the work of the Lord in the

power of the flesh. In the Old Testament the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent

by God to encourage Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple and Zerubbabel responded by

doing what the prophets commanded. Even though Zerubbabel was doing exactly what

God commanded there was a danger that he would go about the task in the wrong way.

Zechariah came with a "word from the Lord" for Zerubbabel that said, "Not by might,

nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty" (Zech. 4:6). The rebuilding of

the temple was ultimately a spiritual work and therefore had to be completed through

spiritual power.

The same temptation comes to those who attempt to do God's work in the church.

Because certain methods and programs tend to work we can be tempted to rely on those

things rather than God himself. In a videotape that accompanies his popular Bible study

entitled *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby says that the most dangerous thing about

some of the methods of the world is that they work. Hemphill has a similar warning:

> With the focus in church growth on methods, models, and marketing
> strategies, we only treat the symptoms of the illness robbing the church of
> its vitality. . . . *As long as we continue to talk only about symptoms, we
> will persist in thinking we can heal the sickness with another new
> program, method, or model* [original emphasis]. . . . Our primary problem
> in churches is a spiritual one, not a methodological one.
>   Church growth is not produced by a program, plan, or marketing
> strategy. Your church's greatest need is not a clearer understanding of its
> demographics, but a clearer understanding of its God. . . . *Church growth
> is the by-product of a right relationship with the Lord of the church*
> [original emphasis]. . . . The attempt to produce church growth results
> through a certain method is an attempt to do supernatural work through
> natural power. . . . God is not a God of confusion. He works through
> human beings and uses strategy and organization. . . . I am simply
> suggesting that the program is not the first or most crucial issue in
> prompting church growth. . . . *The critical issue is the supernatural
> empowering of the church which occurs when the church dwells in right
> relationship with its Head, Jesus Christ* [original emphasis]. (10-11)

Passionate spirituality gets to the heart of what the church is all about. It is not

just a human organization; it is a supernatural organism. Without spiritual life and

passion at its core, the organization may persist, but the organism will die. Passionate

spirituality may be the most difficult of Schwarz's eight characteristics to quantify, but it

is one of the most important. While most church health writers seem to include this

characteristic with an emphasis on prayer or simply consider it a general requirement that

pervades other components, it is listed separately by a few writers (Galloway, "Ten" 33-

34; Evangelical Free web site).

Schwarz found that neither spiritual persuasions (such as charismatic or

noncharismatic) nor specific spiritual practices (such as liturgical prayers or "spiritual

warfare") had a major effect on church development. The key was "are the Christians in

this church 'on fire'?" The health of a church is dependent on participants rising above

"doing their duty" to living their faith with joy and enthusiasm (*Natural* 26). When

Christians catch fire there is life and excitement in a congregation.

Unfortunately, today some have placed orthodoxy in opposition to a passionate

spirituality. Schwarz says that whenever a "defense of orthodoxy" replaces passionate

faith, a false paradigm is at work (*Natural* 27). Rich Nathan and Ken Wilson wrote their

book, *Empowered Evangelicals*, to combat such a false dichotomy. They write,

> Sometimes we just can't have it both ways. But sometimes we can. We
> can, for example, experience worship that includes "spirit and truth,'
> heartfelt intimacy, and thoughtful biblical exposition. We can pray for
> healing, believing God will heal and still leave room for God to be God.
> And we can hear God's voice and feel God's leading, yet still respect
> God's Word as the ultimate source of revelation. (15)

A number of years ago, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a noted Bible expositor felt that the

church was in a crisis. He believed that there was an urgent need for revival (33). He

documented the work of the Spirit in bringing fresh fire into men as theologically diverse

as Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitfield, and D. L. Moody and appealed to

his audience to seek a similar baptism of the Spirit. His words though delivered almost

forty years ago are still prophetic and urgent for today,

> Our greatest danger, I feel today, is to quench the Spirit. This is no age to
> advocate restraint; the church today does not need to be restrained, but to
> be aroused, to be awakened, to be filled with a spirit of glory, for she is
> failing in the modern world. (75)

Passionate spirituality is more than a heightened sense of emotion although it includes emotion. It is the "personal experience of love for Jesus and for brothers and sisters (and not just a rational belief) which is the power behind the spiritual dynamic that is found in most growing churches" (Schwarz, *Paradigm* 124). Passionate spirituality comes from a relationship, not a method or program. It is more than believing about God or even in God. It is, as Henry Blackaby puts it, *Experiencing God* (8).

A growing hunger seems to exist today for this type of encounter with God. Blackaby's study has crossed denominational lines and become the most popular devotional study ever produced by the Southern Baptist Convention. Macchia's extensive church attitude survey found that "experiencing God's presence is of utmost importance to the entire church family. . . . Those surveyed placed it at the top, no matter how we sliced the data" (27).

How can we measure our spiritual vitality? One way is by the prevalence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul writes, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." According to Fee,

> when we receive the Spirit at conversion divine perfection does not set in,
> but divine "infection" does! We have been invaded by the living God
> himself, in the person of his Spirit, whose goal is to infect us thoroughly
> with God's own likeness. Paul's phrase for this infection is the fruit of the
> Spirit. (112)

Macchia, who includes "God's empowering presence" as a health characteristic, writes, "The apostle Paul's list of the Spirit's fruit serves as a plumb line against which

we can measure ourselves. . . . When a church is an island of health and vitality, you cannot help but notice the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of the members (32). Charles Stanley insists that for all the battles over spiritual gifts that the fruit of the spirit is a much more accurate measure of a person's dependency on the Holy Spirit (136).

Other indications of spiritual vitality are available. According to Hemphill, when spiritual renewal occurs, visible evidence is seen. He lists five things that can be expected with renewal:

> First, it will create a renewed hunger for serious prayer. Second, it will be seen in a renewed passion to reach lost people. You cannot encounter Holy God without sharing His burden for the lost. Third, it will result in the healing of relationships among God's people. Fourth, it will create an atmosphere of spontaneous generosity essential to all church growth. Fifth, it will lead to the development of a personalized methodology to accomplish the work to which God has called you to do. (34)

Clearly, passionate spirituality is the heart of church health. We are created by God with a desire for God. When a church is consistently meeting that desire, it will cover a multitude of shortcomings in other areas.

Functional Structures

The most controversial of Schwarz's eight quality characteristics is "functional structures." Schwarz maintains, "Spiritualists tend to be skeptical of structures, deeming them unspiritual, while those from the technocratic camp mistake certain structures for the very essence of the church of Jesus Christ" (*Natural* 28). Although some may resist the idea of structure as a necessary part of the function of the church, structure was included as a distinct health characteristic by a number of church health writers (Callahan 55-63; Galloway, "Ten" 34-36; Barna, *Habits* 57-71; Macchia 157-78).

"Functional structures" relate to the organizational aspect of the church. We saw earlier that although organization is not the primary nature of the church, it is a valid

aspect of a healthy church. As Snyder observes,

> Structure is not the church, just as the wineskin is not the wine. But the structure is necessary in order for the church to live in space and time. Every Christian fellowship must have a culturally appropriate way of doing things at certain times and in certain places. (138-39)

While some, particularly those who are inclined towards a spiritualistic paradigm, tend to minimize the need for structure and sound administration in the church, Gangel states,

> The book of Nehemiah teaches us the spiritual leadership does not scorn proper administrative principles, particularly the principle of organizing one's work. After clear emphasis on *prayer* [original emphasis] (1:4-11), a clarification of *priorities* [original emphasis] (2:1-5), and quite specific *preparation* [original emphasis] for his task (vv.6-10), Nehemiah unfolded his *plan* [original emphasis] for the development of the walls in the city (vv. 11-18). In chapter 3 we see his organizational commitment to two very crucial principles: decentralization *of responsibility* [original emphasis] and *delegation of work and authority* [original emphasis]. (64)

Structure alone does not contribute to health, the structure must be functional. Galloway observes, "Healthy churches streamline whatever level of organization they have in order to get the results they are after" ("Ten" 35). Schwarz indicates that "it is not important how many or how few structures a church has, or whether its structures are old or new, but the criterion is how useful they are in a specific situation" (*Paradigm* 159). Herrington, Bonem, and Furr warn that "existing structures and procedures, if not carefully examined and reshaped, can undermine a specific change initiative before it ever gets off the ground" (72).

Pastor Frank Tillapaugh believes that structure often interferes with ministry. He observes,

> Too often we take our most committed people and make them rear-echelon bureaucrats instead of front-line officers. We produce managers not ministers. In *Leaders*, Bennis and Nanus observe, "The problem with many organizations, and especially the ones that are failing, is that they

tend to be overmanaged and underled." We need to streamline our structures, freeing our leaders to be primarily ministers, not managers. (56)

Snyder has a number of particularly helpful insights on structure in the church.

He points out that the Bible gives very little specific guidance regarding church structure

(139) and then gives three practical criteria for evaluating church structure: (1) *"church*

structure must be biblically valid" [original emphasis] (140); (2) *"church structure must*

be culturally viable" [original emphasis] (141); and, (3) *"church structure must be*

temporally flexible" [original emphasis] (142).

He then goes on to give the following recommendations for viewing church

structure:

> A more helpful option, however, is to view all institutional structures as para-church structures which exist alongside of and parallel to the community of God's people but are not themselves the Church. Such structures have three things in common: they are structured institutionally rather than organically or charismatically; they exist alongside or parallel to the church community; and they exist ostensibly to serve the Church.
> Para-church structures are useful to the extent that they aid the Church in its mission, but are manmade and culturally determined. Whereas the Church itself is part of the new wine of the gospel, all para-church structures are wineskins –useful, at times indispensable, but also subject to wear and decay. . . .
> Several benefits come from this distinction between the Church and para-church structures. (1) That which is always cross-culturally relevant (the Church) is distinguished from that which is culturally bound and determined (para-church structures). Thus one is free to see the Church as culturally relevant and involved and yet not as culturally bound. (2) One is free to modify para-church structures as culture changes, for these are not themselves the Church and therefore are, for the most part, culturally rather than biblically determined. (3) Finally, this distinction makes it possible to see a wide range of legitimacy in denominational confessions and structures. (159-61)

Snyder's distinctions seem to have logical and biblical validity. In most churches,

however, structure is not easily separated from the church. Many parishioners exhibit

more passionate commitment to pet structures than they do to the mission or orthodoxy of

the church. Unfortunately, many pastors would have an easier time changing the Bible

than the constitution or the operating procedures at some churches. However, it is clear

that churches that desire to be healthy must recognize the functional nature of structure

and be willing to modify structures when necessary so that the God-ordained mission can

be pursued with maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Inspiring Worship Services

John MacArthur writes of the importance of worship:

> The concept of worship dominates the Bible. In Genesis, we discover that
> the Fall came when man failed to worship God. In Revelation we learn
> that all of history culminates in an eternal worshipping community in the
> presence of a loving God. From the beginning in Genesis all the way
> through to the consummation in Revelation, the doctrine of worship is
> woven into the warp and woof of the biblical text. (*Ultimate* 2)

What is worship? The English word means to attribute worth (Morgenthaler 46).

Worship recognizes the worth of God. In her book, *Worship Evangelism,* Morgenthaler

gives Gerrit Gustafson's more complete definition. Gustafason says that worship is "the

act and attitude of wholeheartedly giving ourselves to God, spirit, soul and body.

Worship is simply the expression of our love for God, which Jesus said should involve all

our heart, and mind and physical strength" (qtd. in Morganthaler 47). More succinctly,

according to Robert Webber, "worship celebrates God's saving deed in Jesus Christ"

(39). From these definitions, worship is a wholehearted response to who God is and what

he has done, especially through the saving work of Christ.

Church health writers (Callahan 24-33; Logan 76-93; Warren 103; Galloway 36-

37; Hemphill 35-60; Barna 83-111; EFCA; Macchia 41-57; Russell 39-71) almost

universally recognize the contribution of worship services to a church's health. In terms

of health, worship services are akin to pulse and blood pressure at the doctor's office.

They are a standard measure of health. Worship is the most visible of the eight quality

characteristics. In fact, much of a church's identity is derived from its worship services.

In recent years, worship services have become a battleground in some churches.

When churches have attempted to change their worship style (such as from traditional to

contemporary) or their worship target (such as from members to seekers), firestorms of

protest have often erupted. Interestingly, Schwarz found that "services may target

Christians or non-Christians, their style may be liturgical or free, their language may be

'churchy' or 'secular'–it makes no difference for church growth" (*Natural* 30). The only

criterion for success was that it was an "inspiring experience" (30).

A worship service contributes to health when people come with a sense of

expectancy not a sense of duty (Schwarz, *Paradigm* 150). Worship in the early church is

a model of such vibrancy. In the book of Acts, we find that the believers "devoted

themselves to the apostle's teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and

to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Was their worship boring, routine, or even dutiful? Hardly! The

next verse indicates that the result was that "everyone was filled with awe." Few things

can inspire a church like "awesome worship."

Several principles can be observed about biblical worship. The first is that it is

God-focused. The current controversy over whether worship services should target

seekers or believers is somewhat irrelevant. The only acceptable target is God. Any

other target makes our activity something other than worship. Hemphill warns,

> If we ever attempt to use worship for any purpose other than to glorify and
> honor God, then we have begun to move away from authentic worship.
> Worship may have several growth ramifications, such as the edification of
> the saints and the reaching of the lost, but the primary focus of worship is
> the adoration of God. It is wrong to think we can *use worship to grow our
> church* [original emphasis]. We don't use worship. We worship! (42-43)

Marva Dawn echoes Hemphill's sentiments. Referring to the writing of Leander

Keck, she writes,

> An emphasis on what we "get out" of a worship service–above all, that we
> feel good about ourselves–displaces the theocentric praise of God with
> anthropocentric utilitarianism. Since the worship of God is an end in
> itself, "making worship useful destroys it, because this introduces an
> ulterior motive for praise. And ulterior motives mean manipulation,
> taking charge of the relationship, thereby turning the relation between
> Creator and creature upside down." (88)

Asserting that worship must be God-centered does not necessarily deny the

legitimacy of making worship culturally relevant. Worship cannot be authentic if it is

wrapped in forms that have no meaning to the worshipper. It cannot be authentic if it

produces boredom, lethargy, and lack of engagement. Authentic worship must connect

with the worshipper before it can connect with God. The motivation for transitioning

worship is not primarily to reach more people but to help more people genuinely reach

out to God.

A second principle is that worship is participatory. It is something we do, not just

something we watch. Macchia notes,

> The people of God are hungering today for meaningful worship
> experiences. Not the kind of worship where they sit passively back in the
> pews–but the kind that engages and requires their full involvement. The
> key to effective worship in the healthiest settings is engaging people's
> hearts, minds, souls, and strength. (44)

Robert Webber has repeatedly reminded us that "worship is a verb." However,

his experience in working with churches is that most churches he deals with

> are characterized by a passive worship. Worship for many of these
> churches is primarily a sermon with a few Scriptures, prayers, and songs
> interspersed. The involvement of the people is limited to the hearing of
> the Word. (34)

This type of activity (or really inactivity) could be called "watchship," but it really is not

worship. Worship is something people do, not just something they watch.

Another principle for corporate worship is that it should simply culminate the Christian's daily, personal worship. Corporate worship may only be a weekly practice, but personal worship should be a daily practice. When people worship personally on a daily basis, "corporate worship becomes an overflow of what has been happening in the lives of believers all week long" (Macchia 42).

Logan points out that true worship moves us through a process of response to God, which recognizes

> Who God is and what he is like.
> Who we are in relation to him and what we are like.
> The change that he desires to bring to our life.
> Our proper response to his will for our life. (77)

A final observation about worship is that when it is real, it is attractive. Even though the purpose of worship is God-centered not human-centered, authentic worship is immensely attractive to all those who hunger for contact with God. The sad thing about targeting seekers with a worship service is that there can be a tendency to remove from the service the very thing the seeker is seeking–an encounter with God. Morgenthaler has written much about the evangelistic nature of genuine worship. She says,

> People are awakening from the entertainment-induced trance of the 80s and asking, "Is that all there is?" The most significant benefit of a worship service is connecting with God. It does not matter how chatty and interesting the celebrity interviews, how captivating the drama, how stunning the soloist, or how relevant the message. When personal interaction with God is absent, church loses much of its appeal. (23)

Later in the same book she expands this thought:

> If, however, the corporate worship in our congregation is an authentic, dynamic, supernatural event, making worship an in-house affair is like locking up the supermarket the day before Thanksgiving! Are we going to hoard it for ourselves and let the outsiders rummage through whatever spiritual "dumpsters" they can find? Worship is the most powerful tool

we have for satisfying the hunger of famished, injured souls, for breaking down spiritual strongholds of pride and unbelief, and for ushering in the gift of true joy. How can we refuse to use it?. . . *Worship is not just for the spiritually mature. It is for the spiritually hungry, and in the last decade of the twentieth century, that includes more people than we realize* [original emphasis]. (Morganthaler 84)

We have been created by God to worship him. Much of the world is hungering for an encounter with God. Certainly, those in the world who characterize worship services as "boring" have never been in a service that offered a genuine encounter with God. An encounter with God may be frightening, humbling, antagonizing, even alienating, but it is never boring. Genuine worship may be somewhat offensive for the unbeliever at times; after all, "if the Church's worship is faithful, it will eventually be subversive of the culture surrounding it, for God's truth transforms the lives of those nurtured by it" (Dawn 57). However, it would seem that some of the cries of the ineffectiveness of anything less than a seeker-driven approach to reaching the lost through our worship services are off-target. Any person who is genuinely seeking God will not be offended if he/she cannot understand everything in a service if they sense that God "showed up." Worship services do not have to be seeker driven to be seeker drawing.

Holistic Small Groups

Inclusion of small groups as a health factor by church health writers is not as prevalent as the inclusion of inspiring worship services but is listed by many writers (Callahan 35-40; Logan 118-41; Hunter 32; Warren 146-47; Galloway, "Ten" 37-38; Russell 195-226). Schwarz says, "If we were to identify any *one* principle as the "most important . . . without a doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups (*Natural* 33). Additionally, "the larger a church becomes the more decisive is the function of small

groups in the life of the church organism" (*Paradigm* 172). Ralph Neighbor indicates

that "19 out of the 20 largest churches have strong small group ministries with a primary

purpose of evangelism" (qtd. in Galloway, "Ten" 37). Galloway and Mills believe that

"the best and most effective place to train or disciple a future leader is a small group"

(14). Callahan points out that "generally speaking, within the first six months . . . people

will need to discover such a group or they will be likely to join that great Sunday school

class in the sky called inactive members" (36). Clearly, small groups play an important

part in the life of a healthy church.

As useful as small groups are to the growing church today, they are not an

invention of church growth proponents. They are biblical. George Hunter asserts,

> One reason for considering small groups is biblical. The early church
> experienced two structures as necessary and normative for the Messianic
> movement. They met as cells (or small groups) in "house churches"; and
> the Christians of a city also met together in a common celebration or
> congregation (except for periods when persecution prohibited public
> celebrations and drove the movement underground, meeting in homes
> only). This twofold structure is reflected in the Acts of the Apostles and
> elsewhere in the New Testament. Jesus first modeled this pattern by
> gathering and mentoring the twelve disciples as a group, as well as
> worshipping in the synagogue and speaking to the crowds... The small
> group was an essential structure for early Christianity. (82-83)

Snyder says similarly,

> The early church maintained its life and witness by continuing "to meet
> together in the temple courts" and by breaking bread in believer's homes
> (Acts 2:46). The two focal points of its life were "in the temple and at
> home" (Acts 5:42 RSV). . . . There was always this harmonious small
> group/large group rhythm, the small group providing the intense
> community life which gave depth to the large-group gatherings. (147)

Therefore, small groups are not optional for a healthy church; they are essential.

However, the form may vary. For instance, some churches still meet the small group

needs of people through their Sunday school program. While that model does not seem

to be a growing edge in churches today, a number of churches are still doing it successfully.

Other churches have a small group ministry, but there is a good bit of variety in the nature of the groups. Possibly the most basic type of small group is a care group. This type of group forms around the need of every Christian to have a place they can be known, loved, and shepherded. These groups can be formed on the basis of locality (all those living in a certain area), life status (i.e., parents with young children), or affinity (people who want to be together). Any group formed on the basis of locality or life status must be aware that people living in the same area or at a similar stage of life will not always fit together well. The small group structure must be flexible enough to allow for people to move to groups where they fit.

Another kind of group is organized around a task. These groups provide most of the care of a care group, but they are unified around a service area or a specific mission. Since many recognize today that most effective ministry occurs in teams, the task-centered small group can be a very effective way to both meet people's needs and to enable effective ministry.

Snyder is a strong proponent of such an approach to ministry. He writes,

> On the local level, one can imagine the following scenario. Several different small-group fellowships are functioning within the larger community of the church. These are task-oriented or mission groups, each existing for a specific but different purpose. While Bible study, prayer and sharing are common to all groups, each group also has a very specific mission for which it exists and to which it is dedicated. . . . Such mission groups offer the following positive features:
>
> First, the mission group arrangement recognizes and allows for diversity of personalities and spiritual gifts. . . .
>
> Second, the mission group arrangement recognizes that certain tasks are so urgent and of such high priority as to demand the total commitment of a few dedicated people. . . . It is more effective and less frustrating to get a small group involved with a specific mission than to attempt to get a

large number of people stirred up and committed to that task.

Third, this arrangement also recognizes that mission is best carried out in the context of community. . . .

Fourth, the mission group arrangement meets the need for both homogenous and heterogeneous fellowship and worship. The Church must be a reconciling fellowship, which cuts across barriers of sex, social status, age, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and economic standing. Nevertheless, some tasks are best carried out by groups which are in one respect or another more homogeneous.

Finally, for the above reasons, mission groups are often more effective in accomplishing certain tasks and reaching specific goals than lone individuals, appointed committees and boards, or the whole church community in general. The mission group has a higher level of commitment with regard to the specific mission involved. It concentrates and focuses . . . [and enjoys] an enviable flexibility which heightens effectiveness. (154-56)

This study utilized such task-oriented groups to address the health characteristics that are proposed by Schwarz. We hoped to have a task-centered small group to focus on each of the characteristics. Because of the difficulty of forming task groups, however, we concentrated on small groups that addressed our minimum factors.

Another type of small group is the support group. These groups focus on working with those who have great personal needs. These can range from dependency issues to divorce or grief recovery. Many of these groups use some form of a twelve-step program modeled after the one pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

A final type of group is a seeker or evangelism group. While the presence of an empty chair in other types of small groups is a reminder that every small group should be looking for opportunities to evangelize, the seeker group is primarily devoted to evangelism. These groups are usually formed for a limited time and are structured so as to answer the questions and meet the needs of pre-Christian people. Generally, some type of apologetic curriculum is used in this type of group.

Although groups may differ in their primary purpose, every small group has

several things in common. Donahue has isolated four such components. He labels them as love, learn, serve, and reach (82). Different types of groups place a greater emphasis on different components. For instance, a task group would place a greater emphasis on service, and a care group would place a greater emphasis on love.

Possibly the greatest challenge in small group ministry is recruiting and developing a growing group of leaders. A small group ministry cannot rise above the quantity and quality of leadership available. Two factors contribute greatly to having the leaders necessary. First, every group should have an apprentice. An apprentice is a leader in training. After sufficient growth and development the apprentice will be able to lead a new group. Giving potential leaders "on-the-job" experience under godly, qualified leaders may be the most effective way to train future small group leaders (Galloway and Mills 14).

Secondly, recognizing that small group leaders do not necessarily require the gift of teaching can greatly expand the number of potential candidates. Small group leaders must be learners. They must be able to facilitate discussion. They should have a growing understanding of the Bible and have the integrity to admit what they do not know, but they do not have to be great teachers. The dynamics of an effective small group make it more important for leaders to be good shepherds than good teachers. Rod Dempsey says it is important for leaders to set the P.A.C. E. and indicates that praying, availability, contacting, and example are the key qualities of an effective leader (16). If these are present and the leader can facilitate discussion within biblical parameters, the person will be an effective leader even if he/she is not a strong teacher.

Under certain circumstances, a large number of leaders can be trained at one time. A group of apprentices can be trained together in a turbo group. Donahue indicates that

such groups usually need six months to build the apprentices into leaders and then birth new groups (75). The training of our turbo group lasted three months. The turbo group produced some leaders, some apprentice leaders, and some who took the training but did not choose to become involved in leadership of a small group at the present time. The apprentice leaders are ready to assume leadership of new groups that are birthed out of the present small groups.

Many churches try small groups and fail. Often failure occurs because they have made some cardinal errors like assigning people to groups without consideration of affinity, not providing for accountability, or not properly preparing leaders. Other times they fail simply because they are unaware of some practical basics. Dale Galloway used a small group ministry as a central part of his ministry strategy in growing New Hope Community Church from nothing to a church with over six thousand members. He has many years of successful experience. In *The Small Group Book*, Galloway and Mills draw on those many years of experience and give twenty-one principles for effective small groups. These provide the help necessary to avoid some of the little mistakes that tend to kill small groups and are therefore important enough to be listed below.

1. There are three parts to a successful TLC (care) group: sharing a life, conversational prayer, and application of the Bible.

2. Participation is the key to success.

3. Begin and close with conversational prayer.

4. Respond lovingly to a need expressed, immediately.

5. The Bible is our authority and guidebook.

6. Encourage everyone in the group.

7. Don't allow doctrinal discussion that is divisive or argumentative.

8. Practice mutual edification.

9. Lead in love.

10. Following-up with members between meetings is essential.

11. Bringing new members into the group will keep it alive and growing.

12. Handle problem people away from the group on a one-to-one basis.

13. Don't allow people to confess anyone's faults but their own.

14. Don't allow anyone to do all the talking.

15. Make sure the leader is spiritually healthy.

16. Make sure leaders are learning.

17. Hang loose and maintain a relaxed spirit in the group.

18. A good sense of humor is a valuable asset.

19. When you have a need in your own life, ask your group for help.

20. When you have problems or need help, quickly go to your pastor and ask for it.

21. Remember, it is Christ who does the leading, not us (69-77).

How important are small groups? "Cell groups distribute ministry among the laity and bring exponential growth to churches" (Logan 121). According to Carl George, a church of small groups is the only model that allows for unlimited, healthy growth. He calls this kind of church a "meta-church" and cites numerous ministries in countries outside of the United States that have grown to over thirty thousand with this type of model (50-53). Clearly, the often-repeated motto that "as you grow larger you must also grow smaller" is a truth that can most effectively be realized through a small groups ministry.

Need-oriented Evangelism

Some of the last words of Jesus to his disciples defined their mission. While this

mission is found in each of the gospels as well as the book of Acts, the most

comprehensive statement is probably the one given in Matthew 28:18-20. It says,

> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth
> has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
> baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
> Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And
> surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This statement is so important that it is almost universally acknowledged as the Great

Commission. While, as Snyder observes, the "basic priority of the Church is to glorify

God. That takes precedence even over evangelism. . . . Evangelism is the first priority of

the Church's ministry in the world" (101).

The scriptural mandate is so clear and the implications for the growth of the

church are so marked that evangelism in some form is included almost universally by

church health writers as a distinct health characteristic (Logan 94-117; Hunter 29; Warren

104-105; L. Anderson 134-35; Galloway, "Ten" 28-9; Hemphill 147-80; Barna, *Habits*

113-28; Evangelical Free web site; Macchia 135-56; Dever 105-30; Russell 249-274). A

church that does not give priority to evangelism is both disobedient to the Lord and

destructive to itself. A church without an influx of new life stagnates, deteriorates, and

dies. "Healthy churches, without exception, are very intentional about evangelism"

(Galloway, "Ten" 38).

Hunter calls such congregations "apostolic" and indicates that they are

characterized by "compassion for the lost." Apostolic congregations see evangelism

more as a privilege than a duty because they believe that "lost people matter to God."

They understand and like unchurched pre-Christian people in contrast to congregations

who view the unchurched much more judgmentally. "Every apostolic congregation sees

itself essentially as a church 'for the unchurched'" (31).

Unfortunately, the almost universal acknowledgement of evangelism as a priority

for the church has not resulted in it becoming a priority in practice for many churches.

Hemphill writes,

> It is obvious the church today has lost its evangelistic edge. Church
> growth through evangelism has not even managed to keep pace with
> population growth. In truth, we have trailed population growth by 11
> percent over the past thirty years. In the Southern Baptist Convention, a
> denomination which has gained a reputation for evangelistic fervor, no
> baptisms were reported by 5,771 churches in 1992, approximately 16
> percent of its churches. A 1990 Southern Baptist Constituency Study
> revealed that 29 percent of Southern Baptist adult laity had talked with
> someone about Christ and 8 percent had led someone to make a decision
> to accept Christ during the past year. Yet 47 percent of active adult
> members had done nothing to bring a friend to church or introduce them to
> Christ. (148-49)

A multitude of reasons probably contribute to this disparity between the scriptural

mandate and actual behavior. Certainly, one major cause in certain circles has been the

move towards a universalistic theology. God's grace has been defined so broadly in

some circles that no one is lost, and if no one is lost, no one needs salvation, and if no one

needs salvation, then there is no need to evangelize. Schwarz categorizes this type of

thinking by writing

> All universalistic concepts that are developed on this basis have one thing
> in common: the dividing line between belief and unbelief is not crossed by
> *people* [original emphasis] in real life–it is crossed with the aid of *theology*
> [original emphasis]. In the minimal form, all (nominal) church members
> are declared to be Christians. In the next stages, all doubters are declared
> Christians (because they have understood God more profoundly than those
> who are sure), or, if the boundaries of culture are crossed, adherents of all
> religions are declared Christians (because we all believe in the same God).
> In the final stage, all humans are declared Christians, irrespective of their
> attitude to Christ, Buddha, Hare Krishna or whether they are religious or
> anti-religious, church members or anti-church. (*Paradigm* 205)

Such a belief system kills evangelism by destroying any motivation to evangelize.

Another cause is simply a lack of urgency or passion in the lives of believers

(Hemphill 148). Many people in church believe that people are lost and in need of salvation intellectually but are not stirred enough emotionally by that belief to get out of their personal comfort zone and share the gospel. Modern culture is almost irrepressibly self-centered, and so are many churches. The typical church probably spends 95% of its budget on ministries that have little or no evangelistic focus (Ratz 44). Because of our constant tendency to move towards personal comfort, Dr. Dale Galloway has repeatedly proposed in his Beeson Pastor lectures on leadership at Asbury Seminary that evangelism usually must have twice the attention as any other core value or evangelism efforts will slacken.

Possibly the greatest cause in Bible-believing circles for the disparity of our theology of evangelism with our practice of evangelism is widespread misperception over the proper approach for sharing our faith. Many Christians have been taught a method of evangelism that is more like a Fuller Brush sales presentation than anything found in the Bible. They have been taught to be aggressive, confrontive, and to "close the sale" by pressing for a decision, often with people who are virtual strangers. Such a high-pressure approach has resulted in both dubious professions of faith and frustrated evangelists. Many such Christians feel guilty about not sharing their faith but are no longer willing to go through the torment of trying to be something they are not.

Part of the solution to this problem is simply a more biblical understanding of what constitutes evangelism. Augsburger says, "Evangelism is everything we do to make faith in Christ an option. It includes sharing the good word and doing the good deed" (17). Christ's words in Matthew 5:16 give support to Augsburger's definition. Jesus says, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Evangelism is not forcing someone to pray a

prayer, it is sharing Christ in such a way that a person is given opportunity to draw closer to Christ and the Holy Spirit has opportunity to take that effort and bring that person to a point where they will be willing to commit their life to Christ. At times it is simply sowing a word about Christ or living the presence of Christ. Other times it may be simply watering seed that someone else has planted. Occasionally we have the privilege of reaping the harvest. However, throughout the process there is the recognition that results are never entirely in our hands because only God can give the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). Such an approach to evangelism goes a long way to relieving the evangelist of some of the pressure that is often felt.

Much of the work of evangelism does not involve words at all. In his book *Lifestyle Evangelism*, Aldrich clearly established that the first priority of the evangelist is to live the faith. A Christian lifestyle is seen as a necessary precedent to establish the needed credibility to gain a hearing for the Christian message. Logan indicates that three factors, who we are, what we do, and what we say, are important components in the disciple-making process (96). He points out that in most cases our efforts at disciple making will be 80 percent presence, 15 percent proclamation, and 5 percent persuasion (105). And he concludes that "I don't think God expects the majority of us to go cold turkey witnessing" (103).

Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, in their book *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, have formulized a more balanced approach to evangelism.

$$HP \quad + \quad CP \quad + \quad CC \quad = \quad MI$$
(high potency) (close proximity) (clear communication) (maximum impact)

High potency is created by an authentic, attractive, and consistent life patterned after the life of Christ. Close proximity results from shifting focus on the multitudes to spending

relaxed time and building relationships with a few (40-46). Such an approach is consistent with Logan's observation that nine out of ten people who attend our churches come as the result of a relationship (101). Clear communication is an understandable presentation of salvation facts shared at the proper time. Maximum impact signifies both the potential effect in the life of the person being evangelized and the importance of the issue of sharing Christ with lost people.

C. Peter Wagner has theorized that only about ten percent of Christians have the gift of evangelism. Schwarz's research indicates that in healthy churches the leadership knows who these people are and directs them to appropriate areas of ministry (*Natural* 34). However, the Great Commission is not only given to those with the gift of evangelism. All believers are to be involved in some way in the work of evangelism. A healthy church encourages all believers to share their faith within the sphere of their relationships. It also creates somewhat non-threatening opportunities for the average church member to have positive impact on lives for Christ's sake. Such relatively low key approaches include things like need-meeting ministries, events and seminars that bring in the unchurched, and filling the empty chair in their small group (Galloway, "Ten" 38-39).

One of the most exciting ways to involve reluctant Christians in evangelism is to give them opportunities to be involved in what Steve Sjogren calls "servant evangelism." Sjogren has found that "small things done with great love build bridges into darkened lives" (39). Small acts of kindness include things like giving out cold soft drinks on a hot summer day, cleaning toilets for a business, wrapping presents at Christmas, or feeding coins into expired parking meters–all in the name of Jesus Christ and without any expectation of return. Such pre-evangelistic activity softens the resistance of the lost and

prepares them for the gospel. It also allows people who will never do "cold turkey" presentations of the gospel to be involved in sharing their faith on a far less threatening level.

To be effective, evangelism must be passionate, strategic, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Hunter aids us in being strategic by enumerating principles that characterize outreach in apostolic churches. They include

1. They prepare their people in multiple ways;

2. They clarify the goals of outreach;

3. They understand evangelism as a process;

4. They regard outreach as a lay ministry;

5. They train their people for outreach;

6. They practice social network evangelism;

7. They offer "the faith once delivered to the saints;"

8. They address life concerns of pre-Christians (and Christians);

9. They use the language of the target population; and,

10. They represent the gospel with generational relevance (153-62).

He then gives ten ways that apostolic churches communicate the gospel. They are

1. They often begin with "active listening;"

2. They begin where people are;

3. They teach "Christianity 101;"

4. They teach from a reduced canon (focusing on the teaching of Jesus);

5. They practice the "miracle of dialogue;"

6. They cooperate with the principle of "cumulative effect;"

7. They practice the principle of "creative redundancy;"

8. They assimilate seekers *before* they believe;

9. They permit Christianity to become "contagious;" and,

10. They invite an "experiment of faith" (163-67).

Whatever the method, it must be remembered that evangelism is both a command of Christ and an essential quality of a healthy church. Where there is no passion or plan for evangelism, the church will seldom grow and will almost certainly not see growth through conversion. One of the greatest things a Christian can do for Christ is share the gospel. One of the greatest things that Christ can do for the church is to bless it with the fresh life of new believers who have come to faith through its efforts.

Loving Relationships

As Jesus was preparing to go to the cross, he spoke these words to his disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). From these words we see that love between believers is both a command from Christ and a sign to the world. There is little that pleases the Father more than when his children love one another. There is little that impresses the world more than when they see that the people in the church love one another.

Relationships are important in Christianity because at its core Christianity is a relationship. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus said it is to love God and the next commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. All of the Law and Prophets can be condensed down to these two commandments which center on relationships (Matt. 22:37-40).

Christianity is more than individuals who follow Christ. True Christianity is practiced in a loving community. As Ajith Fernando observes in his commentary on the

book of Acts,

> According to the Bible the entire Christian life, including spiritual growth, battling sin and Satan, and serving God, are intended to be done in community. The passages in Ephesians, for example, that describe these things are all in the plural, suggesting that we do them along with others. . . . Community life is an integral part of the basic Christian life because Christianity is by nature a community religion. . . . John Wesley wrote, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness.". . . Community life is not an option for a Christian, but a basic aspect of Christianity. (125-26)

Accordingly, Schwarz found that growing churches have a "measurably higher 'love quotient' than stagnant or declining ones" (*Natural* 36). "The 'love quotient' is an attempt to represent how strongly (or weakly) the Christian ideal of love is practiced in the life of the church" (*Paradigm* 134). Virtually everyone acknowledges the importance of loving relationships in Christian living. While several church health writers list some form of loving relationships as a distinct health component (Hemphill 103-28; Evangelical Free web site; Barna, *Habits* 73-82; Macchia 95-114), others include this dimension in other components such as relationships in small groups.

The need to be known and loved is universal and God created. As Hemphill observes,

> The theme song of "Cheers" said it all. Everybody is seeking a place where "everybody knows your name." . . . People have an innate desire to belong, to know, to be known, and to be sheltered. On the opening pages of Scripture we are confronted with undeniable truth: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). (103-105)

Unfortunately, we live in a world where loving relationships are becoming a rarer and rarer commodity. Divorce is at epidemic proportions. The rage, hurt, and disillusionment produced by these disintegrating relationships usually spills out on anyone close, often including already hurting children. A great host of children are virtually raising themselves, and much of our society is beginning to reap the

consequences of a generation raised without love. In an interview with a Wake Forest

University student, Mother Theresa addressed what she called the poverty of the western

world. She said,

> The worst poverty is the feeling of abandonment, the feeling of being
> alone. . . . People are hungry not only for bread but hungry for love; naked
> not only for clothing, but naked of human dignity and respect; homeless
> not only for want of a room of bricks, but homeless because of rejection.
> (qtd. in Hemphill 104)

In a world that is isolated and lonely, the church is uniquely equipped to minister.

We must rise above the influence of what Macchia calls our "narcissistic age" (95) and

become the loving community that Christ intended. The love needed is not as Schwarz

reminds us, "a romantic feeling that comes on us if we are lucky and leaves us in an

equally mysterious way. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that love is more than a

feeling. It speaks of love as 'fruit'" (*Paradigm* 135). The potential for ministry in such a

church is virtually unlimited.

The problem with many churches is that they have become preoccupied with

programs instead of people. Too many churches are keeping people busy but only

multiplying superficial contacts instead of building relationships. Callahan observes,

> In this country, the preoccupation of local congregations with programs
> and activities is deplorable. People win people to Christ; programs do not.
> People discover people in significant relational groups, not in a merry-go-
> round of programs and activities. (39)

Macchia gives seven directives that can aid a church in moving away from simply

providing programs and move it towards building loving and caring relationships. These

are

1. Express unconditional love and acceptance;

2. Encourage authenticity, transparency, honesty, integrity;

3. Exhibit grace, mercy, forgiveness;

4. Communicate and resolve conflicts;

5. Establish means for bearing each other's burdens;

6. Welcome diversity into your fellowship; and,

7. Equip families through intentional ministries (98-110).

Developing loving relationships is one of the greatest challenges of the church in a culture that is transient and self-centered. It is also one of the most rewarding. The joy that comes into people's lives when they are part of a loving community cannot be reproduced by anything else. A church characterized by loving relationships is not only a healthy church, it is a happy church.

Summary

The case for church health rests on a solid biblical metaphor of the church as the body of Christ. It recognizes that the church is primarily an organism but also an organization. Both the organic and the organizational components of church health can be evaluated and improved. This improvement in health will ordinarily be accompanied by growth. However, church health seems to be a biblically superior model for maximizing the effectiveness of the church than church growth considerations alone.

Although significant diversity appears in the quality characteristics listed by church health writers, there is great overlap. Certain characteristics such as leadership, evangelism, worship services, and small groups or some similar measure of community are almost universally included. Although Schwarz's characteristics are representative and not exhaustive, they provide a statistically substantiated basis for evaluating the health of the church.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Church of Jesus Christ has a central role in God's plan for the world. However, in many places, the Church is struggling and ineffective. Church growth writers and practitioners have attempted to address this problem. While their recommendations have resulted in numerical growth in many churches, their approach has met with significant resistance in some church circles. Some of the most devastating criticisms of the church growth movement have questioned both its theological validity and its personal motivation. Further, numerical growth is so dependent on local demographics that church growth techniques have limited potential in some localities. A more comprehensive and theologically acceptable approach to church effectiveness is needed.

Church health provides a potential answer for this situation. While some may question an emphasis on church growth, few can criticize an emphasis on church health. Healthy churches usually grow. Addressing church health may provide part of the solution to the malaise that is currently afflicting much of the American church.

Rockledge Baptist Church experienced slow, steady numerical growth for the thirteen years preceding this study. This growth in attendance made the church aware of a number of areas of weakness in the church that could limit future growth and effectiveness. The purpose of this study was to determine whether a strategic small group ministry model is an effective way of strengthening church health in terms of eight quality characteristics at Rockledge Baptist Church. An associated area of investigation was to determine if a randomly chosen group would rate health characteristics differently than NCD's standard criterion-based group. A final area of investigation was to

determine the relationship between changes in church health and church growth at

Rockledge Baptist.

Research Questions

Three primary research questions serve as the focus of this study.

Research Question 1

What level of health, as measured by the NCD survey, existed in Rockledge

Baptist Church at the onset of this study?

Schwarz's extensive research has isolated eight quality characteristics that are

most significant in determining a church's health. Rockledge Baptist Church had some

perceived areas of weakness but needed a more definitive understanding of those

weaknesses to address them effectively. The results of the NCD assessment served to

guide and motivate effort to improve Rockledge Baptist's health.

Research Question 2

What effect did a strategic small group ministry that utilized small groups to

address the various components of church health have on the health of the church?

Operational question 1. Did the second and third NCD surveys reveal an

increase in the minimum factors?

At the onset of this study one area of perceived weakness at Rockledge Baptist

involved small groups. A viable, but not flourishing, Sunday school program that met

some of the small group needs of part of the congregation was in place. However, since

this involved a minority of the congregation, a more extensive involvement was sought

through the institution of a small groups ministry. As these groups were formed, there

was an attempt to identify leaders who had a passion for one of the NCD-identified

minimum factors, and they were asked to form a task group to focus on improving that

health characteristic. Because of an inability to get two of the task groups to move

beyond providing care, the strategic task groups were eventually formed through a

reorganization of the church operating structure into ministry teams. The effectiveness of

these efforts was evaluated by subsequent testing.

Research Question 3

What effect did changes in the health of the church have on church growth?

Under most circumstances a healthy church will grow numerically. The

attendance at Rockledge Baptist was tracked to determine what contribution the health of

the church makes to the numerical growth of the church.

Methodology

Questionnaires from NCD were administered to sixty selected lay members from

Rockledge Baptist Church. Thirty of these were part of a criterion-based group and thirty

were randomly chosen. The completed questionnaires were sent to NCD for scoring and

analysis. After I returned from an eleven-month sabbatical, I recruited and led a turbo

group that trained leaders for small groups. While meeting with the turbo group, I looked

for leaders whose gifting and passion motivated them to form a small group to address

one of the specific areas of church health that the NCD survey indicated were among the

weakest. Those factors were holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and gift-

oriented ministry.

An initial attempt was made to address the minimum factors through the task

groups formed from the turbo group. Two of those groups, however, really never became

more than care groups. As a result, new task groups were formed through a restructuring

of ministry organization into ministry teams. After these strategic small groups were

formed and met for six months, questionnaires from NCD were again administered to the

same lay people (with replacements chosen for members who were no longer available). A final set of questionnaires was administered after another six months. The testing and treatment approach created a single-group interrupted time series quasi-experimental design, diagrammed as follows: $O \rightarrow X \rightarrow O \rightarrow X \rightarrow O$.

The "O's" represent pre-, mid-, and posttesting of church health. The "X's" represent six-month applications of the treatment—strategic effort guided by Bob Logan's coaching material to use small groups to improve the targeted quality characteristics of church health identified as minimum factors by NCD. The aim of these surveys was to assess the health of the church according to the eight quality characteristics and to determine whether strategic effort directed through small groups over a year's time resulted in improvement. Changes in church health were then compared to any changes in attendance to determine the relationship between church growth and church health at Rockledge Baptist Church.

Variables

The dependent variable of the study, improvement in the health of the church as measured by eight quality characteristics, is defined as an increase on the NCD survey scale of 1 to 100 on the second and third assessment. An increase in each area is desired, but an increase in the minimum factors is the priority goal of the effort. Another desired impact was an increase in church attendance. Attendance will be compared with any changes in church health to determine if a relationship exists. The independent variable is the strategic small groups that were formed and tasked with targeting specific church health quality characteristics.

Population and Sample

Two groups were recruited for participation in the study: a criterion-based group

and a randomly selected group. The population for each group was thirty volunteer lay members from Rockledge Baptist Church. The criterion-based group met three criteria as specified by the ChurchSmart instructions given with the testing instrument. The three criteria are

1. The pastor considers them to be in the center of church life;

2. They are actively involved in a ministry in the church; and,

3. They are a member of a small group/cell group/home group/ or Sunday school class.

The only criteria for the random sample was that they were over 18-year-old members and attended at least two services per month.

The selection of the criterion-based volunteers was made by consulting the church roster and picking out candidates who met the ChurchSmart criteria. The selection was done in consultation with the church secretary, who was aware of individuals who had either joined in my absence or whose attendance pattern had changed. An attempt was made to select candidates for testing who represented a cross section of the congregation. The process was guided so that the number of men and women taking the tests would be equal and that no more than a single member from any family unit would be included. A pool of potential candidates larger than needed was accumulated and final selection was guided by availability during the testing time. Effort was made to include the same subjects for subsequent testing as long as they were available and continued to meet the ChurchSmart criteria.

The random sample was selected using a randomization table. A greater pool of candidates than needed was originally chosen. The candidates were then contacted and the first thirty who were available and willing to take the survey were included. They all

agreed to commit to participating in subsequent retests if possible. Originally, all participants in the criterion-based group were excluded from the random group, but for the mid-test one participant who was a part of the criterion-based group was selected at random to replace a person from the random group. She took the survey with both groups for both the mid and posttest.

The participants in the turbo group were selected based on perceived leadership potential, the perceived level of influence, availability, and willingness to participate. While certain people were recruited, the turbo group was open to volunteers. However, participation in the turbo group did not automatically result in placement as either a leader or apprentice of a small group. The participants in the turbo group who volunteered to lead a task group were supposed to recruit a small group of people who share a similar passion. Due to some unforeseen difficulties in transitioning care groups into task groups, the strategic small groups were eventually formed through restructuring the ministry organization into ministry teams.

Instrumentation

The instrument for the testing conducted at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the project was a survey developed by NCD. NCD studied over a thousand churches from thirty-two different countries. The study "developed into the most comprehensive research project of the causes of church growth ever undertaken" (Schwarz, *Natural* 18). The survey was further refined through the efforts of Christoph Schalk, a German social scientist and psychologist. He devised "a new questionnaire with rigorous standards for objectivity, reliability, and validity, and used approved methods from social science for the analysis of the data" (Schwarz, *Natural* 19). ChurchSmart Resources of Carol Stream, Illinois then translated and revised the survey for use in North America.

Through their work with churches, NCD researchers isolated eight quality characteristics that contribute to the health of a church. They then developed numerous questions corresponding to each of the eight areas, which, among other things, were to fulfill the following two criteria:

    a. "They had to show an empirically demonstrable connection (factor and item analysis) to the other questions on the same scale (= the same quality characteristic); and,

    b. They had to show a demonstrably positive connection to the quantitative growth of the church (criteria validity)" (Schwarz, *Natural* 38).

The values they obtained were then normed to a median of 50, which would reflect the "average church" on each quality index. They found that differences between growing and declining churches in all eight quality characteristics are "highly significant." Possibly the most significant finding was that every church which had a quality index of 65 or more in each of the quality characteristics was a growing church. Not a single exception was discovered (Schwarz, *Natural* 39).

Church Health Characteristics

Within the confines of church health related writing, about as many different lists of what Schwarz calls quality characteristics are found as church health writers. Most of the lists have a great deal of overlap, but each list generally has some distinctive item or items. This diversity seems to beg the question, "whose list is valid?"

Most, if not all, the characteristics listed by various church health writers have some validity. First, often the lists are not as different as they may initially appear. Writers often include similar factors but list them in slightly different categories. For instance, one church health writer may enumerate the development of community as a health factor and another may specify the existence of holistic small groups. Obviously,

although these values are somewhat distinct there is a great deal of overlap between them.

Furthermore, multitudes of factors contribute to the health of a church. Church health writers have simply identified some of the more prominent ones. Because these factors do not contribute equally to church health, a decision must be made about which factors to include. In many cases the decision seems to be based solely on the writer's personal judgment. Schwarz's massive amount of research and analysis serves to strengthen the case for the health characteristics he enumerates. Although valid questions about Schwarz's research have been raised, presently, no other list even professes to be based on such a substantial research base.

The eight quality characteristics enumerated by Schwarz are

1. Empowering leadership,

2. Gift-oriented ministry,

3. Passionate spirituality,

4. Functional structures,

5. Inspiring worship services,

6. Holistic small groups,

7. Need-oriented evangelism, and,

8. Loving relationships (*Natural*, 15-39).

Attendance

Attendance for this study is the combined attendance of all Sunday morning worship services. An actual count of people in attendance at each service is made and documented each week. These are added to get the total attendance figure. This figure will be utilized to determine if changes in church health at Rockledge Baptist result in

numerical growth.

Data Collection

The NCD survey is a paper-and-pencil instrument with ninety-one questions on four pages. It was first administered to the criterion-based group on 18 April 2000 at 6:30 p.m. The random group was tested four months later but before the formation of any small groups. Subsequent tests were administered simultaneously to both groups. After each testing, the surveys were mailed to ChurchSmart for tabulation and analysis. The procedure was repeated six months and one year after the formation of the strategic small groups.

Generalizability

The findings of this study have direct application only for the congregation of Rockledge Baptist Church. Generalizations to other congregations can only be made with great caution. The data accumulated from the NCD survey adds to the pool of data that continues to be used to validate the NCD instrument. This study may contribute an additional approach for improving church health. That approach is the strategic use of small groups to address areas of weakness as indicated by the NCD instrument.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Many observers of the church agree that there are serious problems besetting the church today. Church practitioners as diverse as George Barna, George Hunter, Ken Hemphill, Christian Schwarz, and many others have documented the decline of the American church. However, often little consensus exists on the exact nature of the problems or what steps should be taken to remediate them.

A relatively recent approach to addressing these problems is to identify the factors that contribute to the health of a church and seek to improve those factors. The purpose of this study was to determine if strategically formed small groups are an effective way of improving church health for Rockledge Baptist Church as evaluated by Christian Schwarz's NCD survey. Because of perceived value and need, task groups targeting holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and gift-oriented ministry were prioritized.

At the initiation of this study, Rockledge Baptist Church did not have an organized small group ministry. About five adult Sunday school classes that were functioning as small groups were meeting with very mixed success. A "turbo" strategy was chosen to initiate the small group ministry because of its potential to generate a large number of groups in a short period of time. The intention was for some of the groups birthed from the turbo-group to become task groups that focused on a designated health characteristic.

Three research questions guided this study: What level of health, as measured by the Natural Church Development (NCD) survey, existed in Rockledge Baptist Church at the onset of this study? What effect did a strategic small group ministry that utilized

small groups to address the various components of church health have on the health of the church? What effect did changes in the health of the church have on church growth?

Selection of Subjects

Two groups of subjects were recruited for participation in the NCD survey: a criterion-based group and a random group. The criterion-based group was selected using NCD's recommended threefold criteria: The pastor considers them to be in the center of church life, they are actively involved in a ministry in the church, and they are a member of a small group/cell group/home group/ or Sunday school class. Additionally, subjects were selected so that men and women would be equally represented, so that no more than one participant from any family was chosen, and so all of the families involved in church leadership (deacons and elders) were represented.

The random sample was recruited from participants who were chosen using a randomization table from all members of Rockledge Baptist Church who were eighteen years old or older. No screening for gender was conducted. Initially, all participants from the criterion-based group were excluded from dual participation. (Because of attrition after the initial survey, a few participants were added and one of them was a part of both the criterion-based group and the randomly selected group.)

Every effort was made to include the initial participants in subsequent surveys. The only exceptions were made for those who left the church in the intervening time period. Those who were a part of the criterion-based group were replaced according to the original criteria. Those who were a part of the random group were replaced by random selection. In the criterion-based group, twenty-five out of thirty (83 percent) persisted through the study. In the random group, twenty-six out of thirty (87 percent) persisted through the study.

Validity and Reliability

The NCD survey was originally chosen because of its self-proclaimed high level

of validity and reliability. In the *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development,*

Schwarz and Schalk write,

> The reliability of the church profile was examined in a study started at the
> University of Wurzburg and continued by our institute. There were 201
> participating churches. From these churches 211 pastors and 3,413 church
> members filled out the questionnaire we used at that time. After analyzing
> the data, revising the questionnaire, and analyzing the new data with a
> professional statistics program, it was possible to develop a new
> questionnaire that is able to measure the crucial quality characteristics of a
> church exactly and reliably. . . . The scales of the church profile have a
> reliability between $r = 0.75$ and $r = 0.89$ depending on the specific scale.
> For a test with an organizational purpose, these are very high values. (232)

Schwarz and Schalk also address validity in the *Implementation Guide to Natural*

Church Development. They comment,

> The validity of the church profile was ensured in three ways:
> 1. To begin with, there was the question asking if the eight quality
>   characteristics we use . . . really do exist. . . . By using a complicated
>   mathematical procedure called "confirmatory factor analysis" you can
>   test if the theoretically designed data structure can actually be found in
>   the data. The result: The eight quality characteristics do not only
>   make great sense on paper, they are also scientifically sound.
> 2. Validity also means that the test results must agree highly with a
>   related external criterion. . . . As external criterion, we selected the
>   growth of the church. . . . The correlation between growth and the
>   eight quality characteristics is . . . quite high.
> 3. Each item on the questionnaire is assigned to one of the eight quality
>   characteristics. . . . This relationship that is statistically calculated from
>   the answers of the respondents is the correlation coefficient. . . . Our
>   analysis has shown that the questions assigned to a certain quality area
>   have a high correlation among each other (up to $+0.82$) while the
>   correlation to questions assigned to other quality characteristics is low.
>   (233-34)

Subsequently, Ellas and Yeakley have raised some serious concerns about the

documentation of Schwarz's claims for validity and reliability (88-89). They also label

NCD's approach as "pseudo-scientific" because of the lack of information allowing for

other researchers to replicate the study (83). In correspondence with Gary McIntosh,

David Wetzler responded by insisting that the documentation was available in German

and NCD was doing the best they could to translate it (Letter 26 Aug. 1-2). Wetzler went

on to criticize Ellas and Yeakley for their "intercultural" arrogance for assuming that the

data should be immediately available in English (1).

Subsequently, *Organizational Diagnosis of Churches* by Christian Schalk has

been made available in English. The copies of the surveys that are included in the back

of the book are still in German, however, which makes it difficult to compare them with

the current survey tool being used in the United States. The reliability scores that Schalk

reports are given in the table below (37-44):

Table 4.1
Reliability Scores for NCD Survey

QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC	ORIGINAL SCALE	AFTER REVISION
Goal-oriented pastor	0.357	0.837
Gift-oriented ministry	0.742	0.874
Passionate spirituality	0.781	0.743
Functional Structures	0.484	0.824
Inspiring Worship Service	0.700	0.766
Holistic Small Groups	0.461	0.887
Need-oriented evangelism	0.614	0.818
High Love Quotient	0.489	0.774

Determining if the revised reliability scores correspond to the current survey

being administered in the United States is difficult. The NCD office in the United States

cannot answer this question and refers callers to the German web site. When questioned

why these answers are not available in English the NCD office asserts that to expect these

answers in English, is an example of the cultural arrogance of Americans.

Further, the reliability scores are reported for groups that meet the three criteria specified by NCD. Since the random group for this study does not meet those criteria, the reliability scores may not apply. Schwarz has no data available for reliability on randomly selected groups.

Formation of Task Groups

A turbo-group was formed for training small group leaders during June 2000. A few individuals who either had an interest in one of the quality characteristics or whom I thought would make a good small group leader were recruited for this group. Others from the congregation who indicated an interest in becoming a small group leader were also included. The training lasted for twelve weeks. Small group participation was a part of every training session. The last five sessions were "on-the-job" training with each entire session devoted to giving the prospective leaders opportunities to lead their groups.

After the training was completed, members of the turbo-group were encouraged to pair with another member of the turbo-group and recruit their own small group. One of the pair was to be the leader of the small group and the other one would become the apprentice. Every group was strongly encouraged to have a trained apprentice in place. Leaders that seemed burdened for holistic small groups, gift-oriented ministry, and need-oriented leadership were identified and encouraged to recruit like-minded participants for their groups.

The original approach was not successful. About a dozen small groups were formed, but the strategic small groups seemed unable to provide care and pursue their task. As a result, the groups devoted to need-oriented evangelism and holistic small groups became care groups rather than task groups. The group devoted to gift-oriented ministry experienced severe turnover in participants because the amount of work

involved reduced opportunity for care. Many of the persons recruited for this group defected to other groups that were devoted to care.

At this point, a decision was made to reorganize the church organizational structure into ministry teams. Either a staff member or an elder was selected to lead each ministry team. These ministry teams were designed to become a task group to address their assigned areas of ministry. The emphasis on care was minimized in these groups so that they could concentrate on their ministry area. The ministry reorganization was successful, and groups devoted to holistic small groups, gift-oriented ministry, and need-oriented evangelism began to meet at least monthly. The only group that retained some of its original identity was the group devoted to gift-oriented ministry. Testing was delayed until these groups had functioned for six months. The mid-test was about a year from the initial testing. The final testing was six months later.

Uncontrolled Variables

Certainly, in almost any behavioral study involving people operating in an uncontrolled environment there are a multitude of extraneous factors that can skew results. Accounting for all the mitigating circumstances is virtually impossible because they are as varied as the participants in the study. In this study however, two unanticipated factors probably had a more general effect on the results of the study.

The first was my return as pastor of Rockledge Baptist after my participation in the Beeson Pastors' Program. Initially, my return resulted in a spirit of optimism and expectation. Soon after my return, I implemented a number of changes that were a result of some of the things I had seen in the Beeson program. Some of those changes became controversial. Two changes that generated a great deal of concern were my decision to dress more casually for our services and my decision to remove the huge wooden pulpit

that separated me from the congregation. While the majority of parishioners graciously accepted these changes, a minority who found these changes objectionable were very vocal and somewhat prominent. Eventually, a number of them left the church. The exit of these members created a tense atmosphere that lasted throughout much of the study.

The second uncontrolled variable that seemed to exert observable influence on our congregation was the unexpected resignation of our worship leader. He had been at Rockledge Baptist for over ten years and was greatly loved by many of the people. Even though this transition was made with grace and harmony, this event seemed to perpetuate a high level of uncertainty in the congregation. A number of people with close ties to the worship leader left the church.

Research Question 1

What level of health, as measured by the Natural Church Development (NCD) survey, existed in Rockledge Baptist Church at the onset of this study?

The results from the first surveys are presented in Table 4.2. The median score for churches in the United States is 50. Since the decision to include a random group was made subsequent to the initial testing of the criterion-based group, an interval of about four months separated the initial surveys. The initial testing of the random group was completed during the time the turbo-group was meeting. Subsequent tests were conducted at the same time for both groups.

Table 4.2
NCD Survey Pretest Results

QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC	CRITERION GROUP	RANDOM GROUP
Empowering Leadership	47	54
Gift-oriented Ministry	56	41
Passionate Spirituality	61	63
Functional Structures	44	51
Inspiring Worship Service	63	69
Holistic Small Groups	40	35
Need-oriented Evangelism	45	48
Loving Relationships	55	47
AVERAGE SCORE	**51**	**51**

The willingness of people to be included in the study was encouraging. Most of the people who were asked to participate seemed happy to "help the pastor out." They were instructed that the survey would take less than an hour but that they were committing to take it two additional times at a later date. All who remained in the church throughout the study fulfilled that commitment.

Although the individual scores differed between the criterion based and the random group, the average was the same for both groups. The scores from both groups indicated that Rockledge Baptist was slightly above average. Although the scoring was different, both groups indicated that holistic small groups was the minimum factor and inspiring worship service was the maximum factor.

Research Question 2

What effect did a strategic small group ministry that utilized small groups to address the various components of church health have on the health of the church?

Operational Question 1

Did the second and third NCD survey reveal an increase in the minimum factors?

Results of Mid-Test

The results of the mid-tests for both groups are listed in Tables 4.3.

Table 4.3
NCD Survey Mid-test Results

QUALITY CHARACTERIS TIC	CRITERION SCORE	CRITERION DIFFERENCE	RANDOM SCORE	RANDOM DIFFERENCE
Empowering Leadership	51	+4	56	+2
Gift-oriented Ministry	55	-1	40	-1
Passionate Spirituality	61	0	52	-11
Functional Structures	55	+11	55	+4
Inspiring Worship service	66	+3	64	-5
Holistic Small Groups	56	+16	46	+11
Need-oriented Evangelism	61	+16	56	+8
Loving Relationships	59	+4	52	+5
AVERAGE SCORE	**58**	**+7**	**53**	**+2**

Several observations can be made from this data. First, the overall score improved in the mid-test for both groups. The improvement in the criterion-based group was greater than the improvement in the random group. The improvement for holistic small groups and need-oriented evangelism, which were targeted by strategic task groups, was the greatest. Interestingly, the score for gift-oriented ministry, which was also targeted by a strategic task group, decreased slightly in both groups. Inspiring worship service remained the maximum factor in both groups.

David Wetzler from NCD made the following observations about the test results:

All indications are you have made significant progress in raising the quality level of the church. This is exciting to see and cause for celebration! It is common to see some areas rise and others fall when working on a minimum factor. . . .You should rejoice in this increase in quality from the first survey! In addition, your previous minimum factor Group A score in Holistic Small Groups went from 40 to 56 and that is a very significant increase (Letter 13 Aug. 1).

Results of Final Test

The results of the final tests for both groups are listed in Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4
NCD Survey Results for Criterion-based Group, January 2002

QUALITY CHARACTERISTIC	SCORE	DIFFERENCE FROM MID-TEST	DIFFERENCE FROM PRE-TEST
Empowering Leadership	48	-3	+1
Gift-Oriented Ministry	57	+2	+1
Passionate Spirituality	63	+2	+2
Functional Structures	64	+9	+20
Inspiring Worship Service	66	0	+3
Holistic Small Groups	62	+6	+22
Need-oriented Evangelism	64	+3	+19
Loving Relationships	65	+6	+10
AVERAGE	**61**	**+3**	**+10**

Table 4.5
NCD Survey Results for Random Group, January 2002

| QUALITY CHARACTERITICS	SCORE	DIFFERENCE FROM MID-TEST	DIFFERENCE FROM PRE-TEST
Empowering Leadership	53	-3	-1
Gift-oriented Ministry	40	0	-1
Passionate Spirituality	55	+3	-8
Functional Structures	58	+3	+7
Inspiring Worship Service	63	-1	-6
Holistic Small Groups	50	+4	+15
Need-oriented Evangelism	57	+1	+9
Loving Relationships	50	-2	+3
AVERAGE	**53**	**0**	**+2**
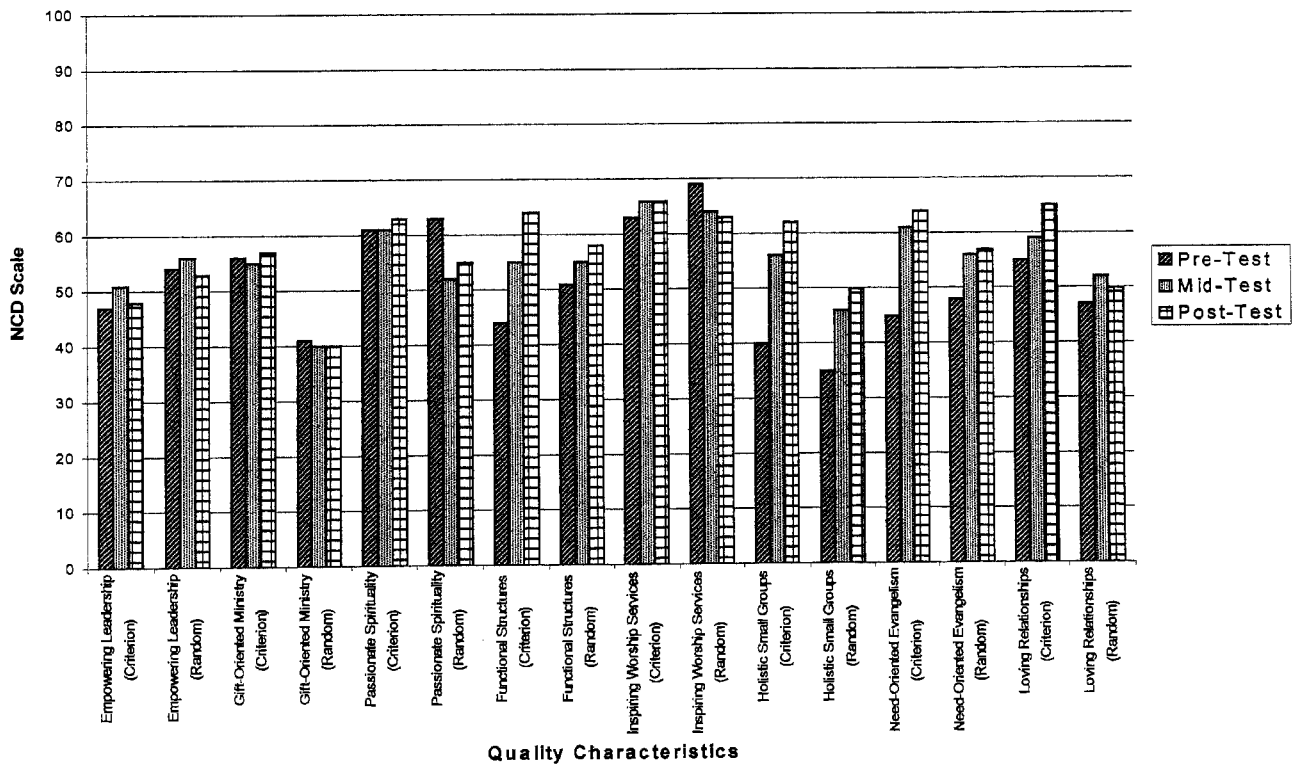
Figure 4.1
NCD Survey Comparison of Criterion and Random Groups

A number of observations can be made from this data. While improvement was shown from the pretest in both groups, the improvement in the criterion-based group far exceeded the improvement in the random group. The scores in the criterion-based group were consistently higher than the random group after the pretest. While the scores were higher for the criterion-based group, the ranking of the various quality characteristics were somewhat consistent.

In both groups, improvement was among the greatest for holistic small groups and empowered evangelism, which were both targeted by a strategic task group. While a slight decrease in the rating of inspiring worship service occurred in the random group and only slight improvement in the criterion-based group, it remained the maximum factor in both groups. Gift-oriented ministry, the final characteristic targeted by a strategic task group, improved slightly in the criterion-based group and decreased slightly in the random group.

David Wetzler from NCD made the following observations about the test results:

> I think you will be encouraged with the scores from this third survey of your church. These comments are based on the results reflected in your **select group** [original emphasis]. . . . In your random group: Did these people meet the suggested criteria of being at the heart of the church, involved in a ministry task and involved in a small group? Or was this a broad random sample of church attendees? The greatest variance between the two groups is how loving they see the relationships in the church. . . . If the random group is made up of people who fit the suggested criteria this variance would carry more weight because they would still be connected, involved people who somehow do not sense a high level of love. If they are a random group in the sense they are not involved in any ministry task or small group it would be normal to see a lower score in this quality characteristic (Letter 22 Jan. 1).

Research Question 3

What effect did changes in the health of the church have on church growth?

The attendance figures for Rockledge Baptist over the past six years are given in

Table 4.6.

Table 4.6
Church Attendance Figures for Rockledge Baptist Church

YEAR	ATTENDANCE	INCREASE	% INCREASE
1996	279	NA	NA
1997	287	8	3
1998	329	32	11
1999	337	8	2
2000	346	9	3
2001	379	33	9

The growth pattern for Rockledge Baptist has been somewhat erratic but has averaged a little less than 6 percent per year. The growth pattern in 1999 and 2000 may have been somewhat arrested by the fact that I was on sabbatical for a portion of both of those years. The growth during the treatment period has slightly exceeded the average growth and reversed a two-year trend of minimal growth.

Summary of Findings

1. Strategic small groups had mixed success in increasing quality characteristics as evaluated by the NCD survey.

2. The success of the strategic small groups in affecting the improvement of quality characteristics was far greater in the criterion-based group than the random group.

3. The overall scores for the criterion-based group were consistently higher after the pretest than the random group.

4. Consistent agreement occurred between the two groups on the maximum factor.

5. Some agreement on minimum factors occurred between the two groups, but that agreement diminished over the period of the study.

6. A positive effect on the attendance pattern occurred along with the improvement of health in the criterion-based group.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Much has been written in the last thirty years on church growth. A number of churches have capitalized on the principles enumerated in this movement to grow large churches. In spite of this success (or maybe because of it) the church growth movement has drawn a good bit of criticism.

A current emphasis that has grown out of some of the legitimate criticisms of the church growth movement has been an emphasis on church health. Church health seems to be a positive adjustment of the church growth movement that is less subject to abuse and possibly more biblically sound. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 2, health is a frequent biblical metaphor for spiritual soundness. This study was birthed out of a desire to increase the health of Rockledge Baptist Church.

The purpose of this study was to see if a strategic small group ministry that utilized task groups to address specific health quality characteristics was an effective way to improve Rockledge Baptist Church's health in terms of eight quality characteristics. Ministry teams were formed and emphasis was placed on improving holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and gift-oriented ministry because of their perceived strategic significance. The study also sought to see if changes in church health were accompanied by changes in church growth.

Two groups of thirty persons were recruited to complete NCD's survey that measures the level of health in eight quality characteristics. One group was selected according to NCD's criteria, and the other group was randomly selected from among the church membership without regard to NCD's recommended criteria. Both groups took the survey three times in a pre-test, mid-test, and post-test format.

Major Findings

The findings of this study were mixed. There was major improvement in both holistic small groups and need-meeting evangelism, which was evident in both the criterion-based group and the random group. There was very little improvement in gift-oriented ministry. The lack of improvement in gift-oriented ministry was consistent in both groups.

Holistic Small Groups

The greatest improvement was made in this quality characteristic. During the period of this study, Rockledge Baptist began a small groups ministry. Before the study there were a few (about five) adult small groups that met as Sunday school classes. The number of small groups has now increased to about fifteen groups with most of the new groups meeting in homes. Small groups has gone from being Rockledge Baptist's minimum factor to a fairly strong factor.

A number of observations can be made in this area. First, caution should be exercised in assuming that the magnitude of this improvement was primarily the result of the efforts of the task group. The first wave of small groups was formed from a turbo-group that I recruited shortly after I returned to Rockledge Baptist. The formation of the groups birthed from the turbo-group preceded the formation of the task group that targeted small groups. The large improvement in holistic small groups is more likely the result of the formation of these groups than the subsequent efforts of the task group.

Because this was originally the minimum factor there was greater room for improvement. The lower the score for any factor the greater is the potential for major improvement. However, the continued improvement from the mid-test to the post-test is more likely attributed to the efforts of the task group.

The task group has organized further training for new apprentices, met regularly with the leaders of the various small groups for encouragement and further training, collected attendance data from the various groups, promoted small groups in the congregation, and encouraged reproduction of the groups. One particularly encouraging development in this task group is that one of the elders of the church has relieved me of the responsibility of leading the group. He has demonstrated competence and passion in moving forward with the vision of seeing as many people as possible connected through a small group.

Furthermore, it seems evident that the rather large disparity between the assessment of this characteristic in the criterion-based group and the random group can be traced to involvement. All participants in the criterion-based group were in some sort of small group. Some in the random group were not. Any person not in a small group could not rate holistic small groups very highly.

An unexpected problem that developed during this study was the difficulty of transitioning care groups into task groups. In spite of the initial commitment of the leaders and repeated pleas and admonitions, two of the care groups never made the transition to task groups. Getting task groups to provide care proved much easier than getting care groups to accept tasks.

Finally, all of the small groups formed from the turbo-group are still in their first generation. Many of them have grown, but none have yet reproduced. Three groups are currently preparing for reproduction. As more small groups are formed, probably more people from the random group will be included in care groups. Greater participation in small groups by those in the random group should result in the health of this quality characteristic improving.

Need-oriented Evangelism

The improvement in the area of need-oriented evangelism was nearly as great as the improvement in small groups. Like the improvement in holistic small groups, the improvement in need-oriented evangelism was consistent in both the criterion-based group and the random group. The improvement was notably less pronounced in the random group than the criterion-based group. Like holistic small groups, this difference between the criterion-based group and the random group could also be traced to involvement. People who are not intimately involved in the life of the church would probably be less likely to evangelize others.

The need-oriented evangelism group has planned two major outreach events each year (a fall festival and an Easter egg hunt), planned and coordinated several servant evangelism projects (free car washes, free Christmas gift wrapping, soft drink giveaway), followed up on guest contacts from the Sunday morning service, organized a mass mailing, and publicized a recent sermon series. Awareness of evangelism is certainly growing in the congregation. The number of unchurched in our services seems to be steadily increasing. The members of this task group have so much enthusiasm that they are keeping the staff member who is leading the group busy.

We have not yet seen a lot of fruit in conversions and baptisms from these efforts. George Hunter indicates that evangelizing unchurched people today must be seen as a process. He writes, "Making Christians necessarily involves a process, which takes place *in stages, over time* [original emphasis]. . . . Apostolic congregations know that helping someone become a follower of Christ involves a more prolonged process--weeks, months, or years" (154).

However, the image of Rockledge Baptist has greatly improved in the

community. A minister in a parachurch ministry, not affiliated in any way with our church, commented recently that we are becoming known as the "community" church. The local police department has approached the church recently with a proposal to operate a clinic at our church that will instruct people in installing car seats and give new car seats to people who need them. They knew that we have reached out to the community in other ways and they will conduct the training, provide the car seats, and do the promotion for the event. People from the church will simply serve refreshments and help with the children of parents who are being given safety instruction. Outreach efforts are gaining momentum at Rockledge Baptist.

Gift-oriented Ministry

The results for gift-oriented ministry may be one of the most surprising findings of this study. In spite of the attention of the task group to this quality characteristic it did not improve and even became the minimum factor for the random group. The results are surprising for a couple of reasons. First, this group got a head start on the other groups. It was the only care group that actually began work on its assigned task before the reorganization into ministry teams.

Members of this task group may have worked harder at their assigned quality characteristic than any other group. They provided training on spiritual gifts, sponsored a "Members in Ministry" Sunday, helped organize a summer schedule of training for ministry, organized and promoted a major collection of data recruiting people into ministry and identifying people already in ministry, and produced a data base from this data that has been used by various other ministries to identify potential workers.

A number of factors may have contributed to the resistance of this characteristic to improvement. First, the identification of a person's spiritual gift, determining the type

of ministries suitable for that gift, training that person for ministry, and then placing that person in ministry probably requires a greater length of time to completely develop than some of the other quality characteristics. Possibly, many people are still stuck in the process and have not yet successfully plugged into appropriate ministry.

Furthermore, people in this task group suffered a great deal of turnover and burnout. The turnover and burnout created a morale problem and increased the burden on the remaining members of the task group. Additionally, the leader of this task group has been greatly distracted by the demands of his business in recent months. As a result the follow-up that is essential for this task has not occurred for several months. The low scoring may reflect some level of frustration from those who supplied data but have not been successfully recruited into ministry.

Functional Structures

The results for functional structures is another surprising result for the study. No small group was assigned to this quality characteristic and no ministry team addressed it directly. In spite of this lack of direct attention, functional structures improved about as much as holistic small groups and need-meeting evangelism. The reorganization of the church ministry structure into ministry teams and the attention task groups gave to their areas of responsibility probably contributed indirectly to this quality characteristic. Since the organization of the church has been a frequent source of dissatisfaction in the past, it was gratifying to see this improvement.

Another factor that may have positively affected this characteristic was the change in me. Christians Schwarz describes two perils that can hinder church health. They are a technocratic paradigm and a spiritualistic paradigm. The technocratic paradigm tends to focus on techniques and the church as an organization. The

spiritualistic paradigm tends to "spiritualize" problems and to focus on the church as an organism (*Natural* 88-91). I tend towards the spiritualistic paradigm. The Beeson Pastors' Program helped me towards a better balance and has given me a greater appreciation for the technocratic aspects of ministry.

Differences between the Criterion-based Group and the Random Group

Few surprises were evident in the comparison between the criterion-based group and the random group. The expectation was that a random group, that may not be as connected as the criteria for the NCD survey requires, would score lower. Interestingly, the factor that was most consistent between the two groups was how they rated inspiring worship service. This is the one factor that would be most similar for all who attend services even if they are not connected in other ways to the church. Some caution is necessary in utilizing the data gathered from the random group since this group did not meet the criteria required by NCD for participation. The data collected might not be as valid or reliable as the data from the criterion-based group.

The contrast between these groups does highlight a legitimate concern, however. The perceptions of those who are "at the heart of church life," and those who may be on the periphery may be very different. Churches should be careful when using data from the NCD survey that they do not neglect persons who are probably most vulnerable to attrition. Failure to address this disparity will contribute to the "back door syndrome" already so prominent in many churches.

Church Growth

The increase in health was accompanied by a moderate increase in attendance. While the increase over the average attendance growth rate was only moderate, a reversal of a two-year trend of minimal growth was observed. This growth may be even greater

than it appears at first glance. As was noted in Chapter 4, there were a couple of uncontrolled variables that had a negative impact on attendance: the resistance of some to change and the resignation of our worship leader. A number of people left the church as a result. The fact that the church continued to grow at a slightly greater pace than average indicates that the church attracted enough people to ease the deficit of those leaving and to continue to grow. Attendance patterns in the near future will be interesting to observe as the fallout from these two factors becomes more and more negligible.

Theological Reflection

According to Matthew 16:18 the church belongs to Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are not free to "do" church anyway we please, but must always operate within the parameters prescribed by Christ. Christ's divine design for the church includes both organizational and organic components. In the words of Schwarz, "the nature of the church is made up of two elements: a dynamic pole (organism) and a static pole (organization). Both are necessary for church development, and both poles are implied in the New Testament concept of *ekklesia* (*Paradigm* 16). Church health provides a mechanism for addressing the welfare of the church that preserves the divine design.

The utilization of small groups to improve health components was an effective way of addressing the needs of the church without compromising either the organic or the organizational dimensions of the church. Small groups are not a recent innovation but rather an approach to ministry that rests on strong biblical precedent. As George Hunter asserts, "One reason for considering small groups is biblical. The early church . . . met as cells (or small groups) in "house churches"; and the Christians of a city also met together in a common celebration" (82). A small group possesses the same organic and organizational characteristics of the larger assembly. The proliferation of small groups

and their utilization in improving health characteristics clearly preserves the divine design. It may be one of the healthiest ways to address church health.

One somewhat unhealthy aspect of this study was the high degree of burnout and turnover in the task group that targeted gift-oriented ministry. Clearly, just doing ministry with other people in a small group does not automatically preserve health. Snyder who is an enthusiastic supporter of such task-oriented or mission groups indicates that Bible study, prayer, and sharing should be a part of such groups even as they pursue their ministry (154). Donahue similarly indicates that love, learn, serve, and reach should be components of all small groups (82).

Task groups, by their very nature, place a greater emphasis on serve than the other components. However, task groups should be careful not to eliminate the other components. The gift-oriented ministry task group in this study seems to have neglected the loving and learning components. The magnitude of their task tended to squeeze out of their meetings some of the very components that make it advantageous to work together in ministry.

The burnout and turnover in the gift-oriented task group gives some insight into the "back-door syndrome" prevalent in many churches. The attrition in the task group illustrates the danger of concentrating on organizational aspects of ministry at the expense of organic aspects. The task group produced a considerable amount of work (organizational success) but eventually became non-functioning (organic failure). As a result the final stages needed to accomplish their task have not been completed and much of their effort appears to have been wasted. Some members left the group and others became less active in their participation. Fortunately, those who left the task group did not leave the church but found other small groups that met their need for care.

The failure of the gift-oriented ministries group also shows the difficulty of reshaping a church culture. Gift-oriented ministry is taught in Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:7-13; and 1 Peter 4:7-11. The necessity of knowing your spiritual gift and using it in ministry has been taught regularly from the pulpit of Rockledge Baptist for years. Additionally, classes on spiritual gifts have been offered on a number of occasions. However, as Schwarz observed, the matching of a person with a ministry corresponding to their spiritual gifts is the point where most churches fail (*Paradigm* 185).

Matching people with a ministry that fits their spiritual gift is exactly the point where Rockledge Baptist is struggling. While most members of Rockledge Baptist would affirm the need to know and minister in their area of giftedness, many are not doing it. The dramatic change that must occur for gift-oriented ministry to be implemented in their lives was probably too large a task to be accomplished in a short period of time. Although as Schwarz notes, "probably no factor influences the contentedness of Christians more than whether they are utilizing their gifts or not" (*Natural* 24), many people are reluctant to make the necessary changes. Such life change probably should be approached more gradually with more incremental steps than the gift-oriented task group allowed.

Much of the design of this study was pragmatic. The purpose was to see if health and attendance improved when teams of people worked together to improve certain quality characteristics. Pragmatism has a bad name in many church circles. In fact, Schwarz enumerates six dangers of pragmatism (*Natural* 101-102).

However, in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, Paul validates a certain amount of pragmatism as an appropriate approach to ministry. Paul writes,

> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to
> everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to
> win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law
> (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.
> To those having the law I became like one not having the law (though I
> am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those
> not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have
> become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save
> some.

As C. Peter Wagner observes, this kind of pragmatism is "not the kind of pragmatism that

treats people as objects and dehumanizes them. It does not mean pragmatism that will

compromise the doctrinal and ethical principles of God, the Bible, and the kingdom. But

it does mean pragmatism as far as value-neutral methodologies are concerned" (71).

From a pragmatic perspective, the study produced some positive results. Both

holistic small groups and need-oriented evangelism improved dramatically. Additionally,

there was some improvement in church attendance. Regardless of any practical benefits

to the congregation however, working with others has spiritual and personal value. God

designed the church as a community and not just a collection of individuals.

In his commentary on the book of Acts, Ajith Fernando makes a strong case for

the essential nature of Christianity as a community religion. He says,

> According to the Bible the entire Christian life, including spiritual growth,
> battling sin and Satan, and serving God, are intended to be done in
> community. The passages in Ephesians, for example, that describe these
> things are all in the plural, suggesting that we do them along with
> others. . . . Community life is an integral part of the basic Christian life
> because Christianity is by nature a community religion. . . . John Wesley
> wrote, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but
> social holiness.". . . Community life is not an option for a Christian, but a
> basic aspect of Christianity. (125-26)

Similarly, Howard Snyder maintains,

> Too often the Church has been seen more as a mere collection of saved
> souls than a community of interacting personalities . . . Spiritual growth
> occurs best in a caring community. There are spiritual truths I will never

grasp and Christian standards I will never attain except as I share in community with other believers–and *this is God's plan* [original emphasis]. (74-75)

Whether working in ministry teams positively affects either church health or church growth, it is the way ministry is supposed to be done. Even if it should not benefit the entire church (which seems inconceivable), it benefits the persons who interact with others to do ministry. God's observation in Genesis that "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18), still has application for ministry.

Limitations of the Study

The greatest and most serious limitation of this study was that it attempted to measure the affect of specific changes in the midst of a climate of change. Behavioral studies that do not occur in a laboratory always face the problem of factors unrelated to the study distorting the data. Humans are not guinea pigs that can be manipulated and controlled at will. However, the magnitude of the potential for such distortion was probably amplified by the fact that my return as pastor was accompanied by a number of changes not related to this study. Limiting such changes for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the study would have been unfair to the church and a disservice to the kingdom of God. A similar study in a church that is in a period of greater stability might be more helpful.

A further limitation of the study is the lack of an inferential statistical analysis that would allow stronger conclusions to be drawn from the data. Such a statistical analysis was hindered by the nature of the scores obtained from the NCD survey and a lack of detailed documentation about how the NCD scores are derived. Although Schwarz strongly asserts the scientific nature of his survey instrument (*Natural* 19), as Ellas and Yeakley point out, much of the documentation of that claim is not readily available (83-

85). While the release of Schalk's *Organizational Diagnosis of Churches* has provided some of this substantiation, NCD is still very guarded with the release of specific information that would enable the researcher to do more extensive statistical analysis of results obtained using the NCD survey.

A final limitation of the study was its limited duration. Most of the initial effects from the treatment have been positive, however, some of those effects are still in their formative stages. A longer study could reveal both the permanence of the changes already observed and give more time for other changes to manifest themselves.

Contribution to Existing Knowledge

Probably the greatest contribution this study makes to the current body of knowledge about church health involves the inclusion of a random group in the NCD survey. The results from this group indicate that those who may not be "at the heart of the life of the church" may have very different perceptions about the church from those who are more involved. The poorer scores for the random group indicate a need to make sure that positive test scores are not overly generalized to the entire church population. Further study that uses a random sample could give greater insight into how the disparity of perceptions between people with different levels of connection to the church affects the overall health of the church.

Further Research

Church health is a movement still in its infancy. Much of the information being generated by numerous sources is entirely suppositional. Certainly, much more research needs to be done to see if an emphasis on church health has the positive effects that church health proponents surmise. Research that tracks churches and their health over extended periods of time would be particularly beneficial.

This study highlighted, however, a particular area of concern for those using the NCD Survey. There was a wide divergence in the perceptions of a random group from those who were a part of a criterion-based group. This disparity is an area ripe for further investigation. Some questions that need to be answered include: Is the NCD survey valid and reliable for a random sample? Is the difference observed in this study between the two groups an exception, or would this be more generally observed? Do the lower health scores for the random group diagnose a symptom that contributes to attrition among those who may be on the periphery of much of church life? If so, can this tool help in the design of a treatment to reduce this attrition? These questions are not peripheral. They strike at the heart of one of the weaknesses of the modern church—the tendency to welcome people in the front door at about the same rate we lose them out the back door. Answers to these questions could become one of the great benefits of the current emphasis on church health.

Epilogue

This study has brought us to a point where excitement and anticipation are permeating our church. Recently, two men who are active in our church commented that Rockledge Baptist Church seems right on the verge of boiling. They said that it was like a pot just before it explodes in a boil—you see a few bubbles here and there that indicate a boil is near. They sense that the Spirit is working and our congregation is ready to explode into a new level of Spirit empowered ministry. Change has been difficult as it often is. But the negative effects of change seem to have run their course and the positive benefits of change seem close on the horizon.

The signs that a boil may be near are numerous. People are praying and giving like never before. The unchurched are visiting the services. The church is considering

some major building modifications that will increase seating capacity and a third service

is in the formative stage. While it may be somewhat misleading because of normal

seasonal fluctuation in Florida, attendance for the first six weeks of 2002 is averaging

415. The attitude of the church seems to be that the best is yet to come. Possibly, the

greatest effect of some of the changes initiated through this study is just ahead.

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